

PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work

By Christine Lalonde



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BIOGRAPHY

Pitseolak Ashoona had “an unusual life, being born in a skin tent and living to hear on the radio that two men landed on the moon,” as she recounts in *Pictures Out of My Life*. Born in the first decade of the twentieth century, she lived in semi-nomadic hunting camps throughout southern Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island) until the late 1950s when she moved to the Kinngait (Cape Dorset) area, settling in the town soon thereafter. In Cape Dorset she taught herself to draw and was an active contributor to the annual print collection. By the 1970s she was a world-famous artist, with work exhibited across North America and in Europe. She died in 1983, still at the height of her powers.



EARLY YEARS

In *Pictures Out of My Life*, an illustrated book of edited interviews with the artist, Pitseolak Ashoona recounts that she did not know the year of her birth. Based on various documents and stories handed down in the family, she is believed to have been born in the spring sometime between 1904 and 1908 at a camp on the southeast coast of Tujakjuak (Nottingham Island), in the Hudson Strait.¹ Her parents were Ottochie and Timungiak; Ottochie was the adopted son of Kavavow, whose family originated in Nunavik but was expanding across the strait. At the time of Pitseolak's birth, her parents and older siblings were en route from the Nunavik region of Arctic Quebec to the south coast of Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island).² They were making the arduous crossing over land and water to be closer to Ottochie's family and better hunting as well as trapping for the fur trade.³



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *Journey to Toodja*, c. 1973, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.7 x 66.3 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. RIGHT: Pitseolak's father, Ottochie, in Idjirituq, c. 1921-22; the ice block will be used as a window in an igloo. Photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan.

The family stayed at Tujakjuak until the following spring, crossing over to Tuja, a camp on Akudluk (Salisbury Island), before landing on the main island of Qikiqtaaluk, possibly on board the whaling ship Active for the last part of the journey.⁴ During the first years of her life, Pitseolak's family continued to move along the southern coast by umiaq (sealskin boat), following the shoreline to Seengaiyak, a camp above present-day Iqaluit, and possibly as far as Cumberland Sound on the other side of Qikiqtaaluk.⁵

By the time she was five or six, Pitseolak had travelled with her family thousands of kilometres along the southern coast of Qikiqtaaluk. Travelling these distances by umiaq and dog team and qamutiq (sled), as well as on foot, Inuit developed a profound knowledge of the landscape—one that would later inform and inspire Pitseolak's art.



This map of southern Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island) locates the hunting camps where Pitseolak lived until the late 1950s.

Returning to the Foxe Peninsula around 1913, they joined other family members in the area, living in outlying camps with groups that ranged from immediate relatives to as many as fifty people. That same year, a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post was established in what would become Cape Dorset, and while Pitseolak's family hunted seasonally they also trapped fox to trade furs for goods at the post. With the decline of whaling and the rise of the fur trade, which flourished with the demand for white fox in Europe and elsewhere, by the 1920s seventy trading posts had been established across the Arctic. Inuit prospered from the competition between HBC and other traders, such as the Baffin Trading Company in Cape Dorset.⁶



LEFT: Fox pelts hanging from the rigging of the *Bowdoin*, an Arctic exploration schooner that was iced in at Idjirituq (Schooner Bay) during the winter of 1921-22. Photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. RIGHT: Hudson's Bay Company post, Cape Dorset, 1928. Photograph by J. Dewey Soper.

During prosperous years, with fur trapping supplementing subsistence hunting, the family thrived. Their encounters with the outside world—mostly ships and their crews—were largely positive. Pitseolak remembered as a young girl playing on the wreck of the *Polar Star*, which had sunk off the coast in 1899, and the useful materials such as wood that could be salvaged.⁷ Later, Ottochie was among those who worked on board the *Bowdoin*, an Arctic exploration schooner that was iced in at Idjirituq (Schooner Bay) during the winter of 1921-22.⁸



LEFT: The schooner *Bowdoin* at Idjirituq (Schooner Bay) during the winter of 1921-22. The crew worked with local Inuit to construct snow domes over the boat's hatches; the domes provided wind protection while allowing air to circulate into the vessel. Photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. RIGHT: The camp of Pitseolak's uncle Kavavow at Idjirituq in the winter, c. 1921-22. Photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan.

The family's prosperity came to an end with the death of Ottochie the same year.⁹ "My father is the first person I remember dying. I was very young, and I was with him when he died,"¹⁰ she recalled. Pitseolak's uncle Kavavow arranged for her marriage to Ashoona, whom she had known since childhood. The union however, was initially a frightening one, which she recounted years later:



When Ashoona came to camp I didn't know why he came. I didn't know he came for me. I thought he'd just come for a visit—until he started to take me to the sled. I got scared. I was crying and Ashoona was pushing and sometimes picking me up to try to put me on the [sled].... The first time I was sleeping beside my husband his breath was so heavy, his skin so hard. But after I got used to my husband I was really happy; we had a good life together.¹¹

As was the custom, Ashoona brought Pitseolak and her mother to his relatives' camp at Ikirasaq. They were married in a Christian ceremony in Cape Dorset in 1922 or 1923 by the Anglican clergyman known as Inutaquuq.¹²



Pitseolak and her brother Kavavow, recently returned from a hunt, c. 1921-22. Photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan.

MARRIED LIFE

Pitseolak and Ashoona moved between camps up to ten times a year, following the seasons and animal migrations. Travelling between the main camps of Tariungajuk in the fall and Igaliq in the summer, they would spend time at Tujakjuak, Akudluk, Ikirasaq, Idjirituq, Iqsaut, Qaqmaaju, and Netsilik.¹³ They left Ikirasaq, the main camp, before their first child, Namoonie, was born on Akudluk Island.¹⁴ Pitseolak gave birth to seventeen children, one each year of her marriage to Ashoona, though only six—Namoonie, Qaqaq, Kumwartok, Kiugak, Napachie, and Ottochie—lived with her until adulthood. Some died in childhood, and others were adopted out, as was customary, and raised by other Inuit families.¹⁵



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Camp at Igadalik*, 1973, stonecut on paper, printed by Timothy Ottochie, 62 x 86.5 cm.

Pitseolak's life during the 1920s and 1930s was fully occupied with her growing family. The family depended on her abilities to prepare skins and sew weatherproof shelter and clothing, including waterproof footwear, which was key to survival in the Arctic. As her son Kiugak Ashoona (1933-2014) recounted, "My mother was only one person who was looking after so many children and also her husband. And she would make parkas out of caribou skin. So it was just one lady with a needle and a lot of thread, making parkas for all of her children and her husband!"¹⁶



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

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Ashoona was recognized as a capable man and a strong hunter; he led the family to distant inland camps such as those around Nettilling Lake. Pitseolak recalled their isolation in the early years there: "The first time I went to Netsilik we were all alone for a year, and Ashoona delivered my son Kumwartok. With my mother's help."¹⁷ In an interview in 1979 Kumwartok explained, "It seems like only the men who were really men—who were really good hunters—would go to Netsilik

because it was so far from shore."¹⁸ Ashoona occasionally left the family to serve as a guide; he worked for the naturalist J. Dewey Soper on at least one of his treks in search of the blue goose nesting grounds. According to Kiugak, Ashoona may also have worked at the weather station on Tujakjuak and helped with map-making during the early years of the Second World War, just before his death.¹⁹

Pitseolak never dwelled on the difficult aspects of camp life: "This was the old Eskimo way of life; you couldn't give up because it was the only way. Today I like living in a house that is always warm but, sometimes, I want to move and go to camps where I have been. The old life was a hard life but it was good. It was happy," she recalled.²⁰ Decades later, she drew on these years as source material for her artwork.

Sometime in the early to mid-1940s Ashoona died during an illness when the family was at the Netsilik camp.²¹ Echoing Pitseolak's experience of the loss of her father, the death of her husband, the principal hunter for the family, marked the beginning of a period of hardship for her and her children. It coincided with the early years of the Second World War and a decline in the market for furs. The ensuing financial and social instability made it difficult for community members to support the widowed Pitseolak and her six children in their camps. Her daughter Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002) recalled this time: "My



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1979-80, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 51.1 x 66.1 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This drawing shows a stretched polar bear skin and the tools used by Inuit women.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Camp joyfully greeting the return of a family member)*, 1976, graphite on paper, 51 x 60 cm, private collection.



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966-76, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 35.5 x 21.6 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. In this scene of summer camping, Pitseolak places a family in a fishing weir, with fishing spears, skin pails, and other tools in the foreground. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *The River at Netsilik*, c. 1966-76, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 66.4 x 51 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.





mother used to try her best to make it so we could have something to eat. But we used to be hungry after my father died.”²²

After Ashoona’s death Pitseolak left the inland camps and took her family to Cape Dorset to be near relatives; she discovered, though, that her relatives had either died or moved away.²³ The next several years were difficult, but the family persevered. The art historian Marion E. Jackson describes how they lived, based on her interviews with Pitseolak and the Ashoona family:

In the lean years following Ashoona’s death, Pitseolak and her growing children lived in camps with other families. Gradually, her sons grew stronger and became good hunters. In time, they were able to provide the food and skins needed by their mother. As they married and started their own families, Pitseolak lived with her sons in the outlying camps, eventually spending her final years in the household of her son Koomuatuk [Kumwartok] when they moved into permanent housing in Cape Dorset in the early 1960s.²⁴



LEFT: Portrait of Pitseolak Ashoona, c. 1942-45. Photograph by Peter Pitseolak. In the 1950s, Pitseolak lived for a time in a camp outside Cape Dorset headed by Peter Pitseolak. RIGHT: Napachie Pootoogook, *Napachie's Family*, 1998-99, black felt-tip pen and coloured pencil on paper, 51 x 66.5 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Napachie depicts herself with a yellow skirt, her mother (Pitseolak) in an amauti, and her five brothers (left to right: Qaqqaq, Kumwartok, Namoonie, Kiugak, and the youngest, Ottochie), soon after the death of her father, Ashoona.

The transition from life on the land to settlement living—the most drastic change to Inuit society in the twentieth century—was met by Pitseolak with resolve and an optimistic nature.

Ashoona’s death was a tragedy for his family, but it provided the catalyst that would eventually lead Pitseolak to become an artist. As she said decades later, “After my husband died I felt very alone and unwanted; making prints is what has made me happiest since he died.”²⁵ Despite the impact of the years of hardship that followed his death, scenes of deprivation or suffering almost never appear in her drawings, though certain images convey sadness and longing at his passing. Pitseolak was one of the first Inuit artists to create openly autobiographical work, yet she focused almost completely on good memories and experiences.



EARLY ARTMAKING

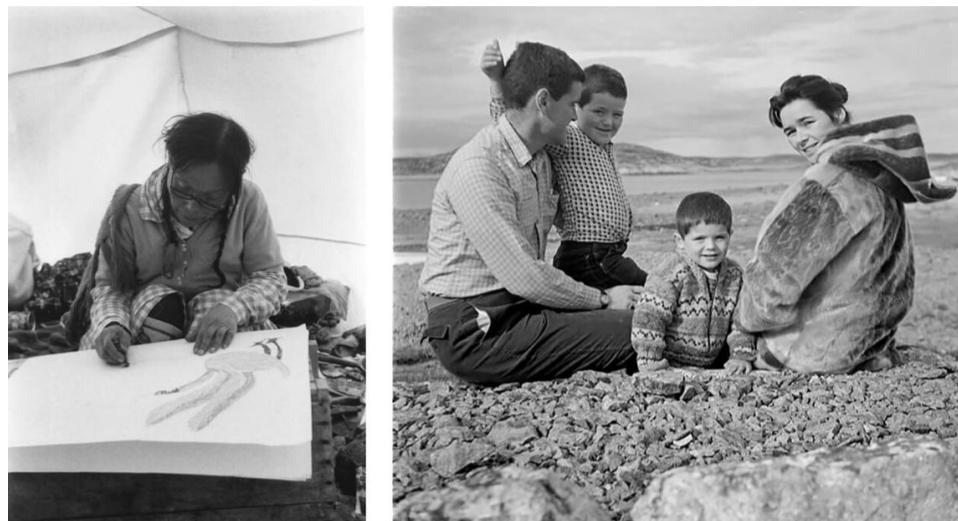
In the 1940s and 1950s an Inuit widow, particularly with young children, would have remarried to maintain the complementary gender-related roles necessary for survival. It is unusual that Pitseolak never did and even more remarkable that she was able to eventually provide for her family by making art.

Her opportunity came with an arts and crafts program initiated in Cape Dorset by the department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Indian Affairs and

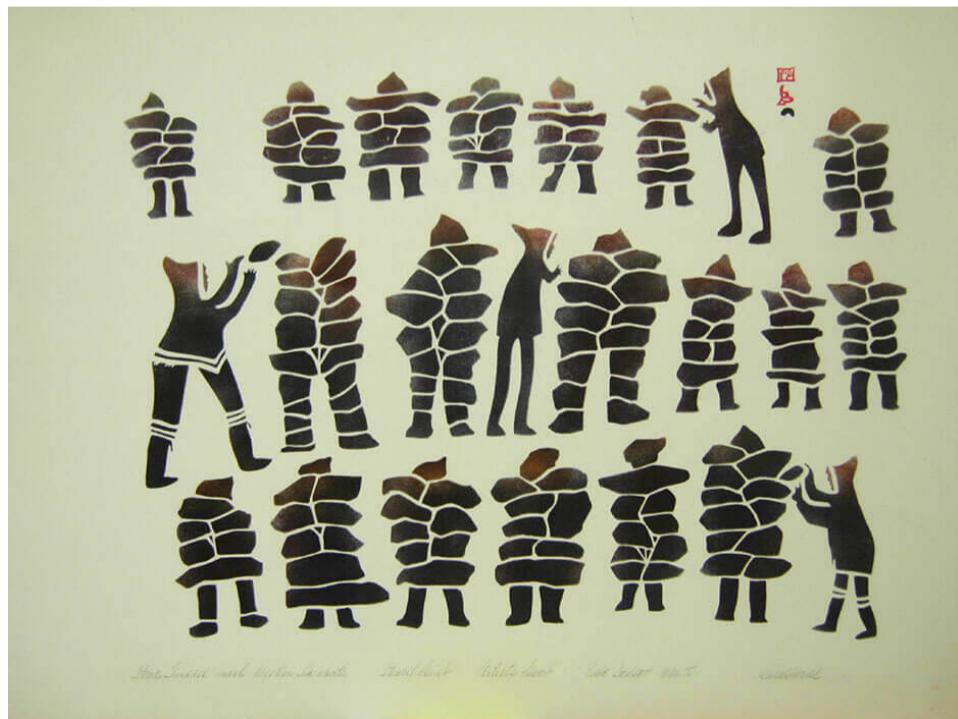
Northern Development after 1966) as an economic incentive for Inuit who were making the transition from subsistence hunting and trapping to a wage economy in settled communities. The artist James Houston (1921–2005) and his wife, Alma Houston (1926–1997), were instrumental in developing the program. James Houston first travelled to the Arctic in the late 1940s and returned to Montreal with a collection of small Inuit carvings. Encouraged by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and grants from the federal government, the Houstons moved to Cape Dorset in 1956 to work with the Inuit.

Although Inuit had carved small objects, usually in sea ivory, as a pastime for centuries, there was no precedent for drawing images on paper or printmaking, or for the notion of the artist as a role within the community. James Houston devoted his efforts to the introduction of printmaking and stone sculpting. Alma focused on the traditional skills of Inuit women and explored the potential for hand-sewn goods.

The sewing that Pitseolak had done throughout her life led her to work with Alma Houston on clothing production for sale in the developing market for Inuit arts and crafts. For two years Pitseolak made finely decorated parkas, mittens, and other items that were sold through the newly formed West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative.²⁶



LEFT: Pitseolak drawing in her summer tent in Cape Dorset, June 1967. Photograph by Evelyn Crees. RIGHT: James, John, Samuel, and Alma Houston in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, 1960. Photograph by Rosemary Gilliat Eaton.



Kiakshuk, *Stone Images Mark the Western Sea Route*, 1960, stencil, printed by Timothy Ottochie, 48.4 x 61.1 cm. Prints like this, of men constructing a series of inuksuit, circulated in galleries and institutions across Canada and internationally in the 1960s.



However, after seeing the drawings and prints created by her elder cousin Kiakshuk (1886-1966), and intrigued by the possibility of making a better income, Pitseolak decided to try drawing:

I started drawing after other people around here had already started. Nobody asked me to draw. Because my son's wife died when their two children were very young, his children used to be with me. One night, I was thinking, "Maybe if I draw, I can get them some things that they need." The papers were small then, and I drew three pages of paper. The next day I took them to the Co-op, and I gave them to Saumik, and Saumik gave me \$20 for those drawings.... Because for my first drawings I got money, I realized I could get money for them. Ever since then, I have been drawing.²⁷

Her efforts were well received by James Houston, who encouraged her to continue, taking as her subject the traditional Inuit way of life. In the early 1960s Terrence Ryan (1933-2017) replaced Houston and went on to play a vital role in the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, the printshop (now known as Kinngait Studios), and Dorset Fine Arts, the Co-op's marketing division. Ryan also admired Pitseolak's wide-ranging imagination and discipline and continued to support her artmaking efforts.



Inuit artists and Terrence Ryan at the print studio in Cape Dorset, 1961. From left, front row: Parr, Kiakshuk, Kenojuak Ashevak, Lucy Qinnuayuak, Napachie Pootoogook; second row: Pitseolak Ashoona, Egevadluq Ragee, Pudlo Pudlat; back row: Terrence Ryan. Photograph by B. Korda.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1959-61, graphite on paper, 21.6 x 27.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. An early drawing by Pitseolak showing a family feeding their dogs.

Thus began Pitseolak's exceptional career. That her vibrant images were chosen to be editioned for the Cape Dorset print collection year after year is a tribute to her talent and speaks to the esteem in which she was held by those involved in the studio production and by the collectors. She made over 8,000 drawings, possibly closer to 9,000, of which approximately 250 were made into prints.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Joyful Owl*, 1961, stonecut on japan paper, printed by Eegyvudluk Pootoogook, 31 x 41.1 cm.



Printmakers Iyola Kingwatsiaq and Eegyvudluk Pootoogook in 1960, pulling a print of Pitseolak's *Joyful Owl*. Photograph by Rosemary Gilliat Eaton.

During the 1960s, while Pitseolak was actively creating successful work, she was constantly exploring her media, teaching herself how to draw. Beginning with graphite pencils on poor-quality paper, she developed the themes that she would return to and refine throughout her career. By the 1970s she had perfected her style and technique, and this later period represents her most resolved and successful drawings.

1970S: THE CRITICAL DECADE

The 1970s was a period of great success for Pitseolak, both in the attention and honours she received and in her artistic production. The publication of *Pictures Out of My Life* in 1971 led to much wider interest in her life and work.

It is rare to have access to a detailed biography for Inuit artists of Pitseolak's generation, much less a record of an individual's thoughts and perceptions. The historian and writer Dorothy Harley Eber recognized that Pitseolak had a remarkable story to tell, and it is largely a credit to Eber and the Inuktitut translators she worked with that Pitseolak's life is so well documented and recorded in the artist's own words.

During a brief stopover in Cape Dorset in 1968, her first trip to the community, Eber interviewed Pitseolak, among other artists. After meeting Pitseolak, she decided to return and do more interviews. In the summer of 1970 Eber spent three weeks with Pitseolak as she recounted events from her life, with the assistance of two translators, Quatsia Ottochie and Annie Manning.

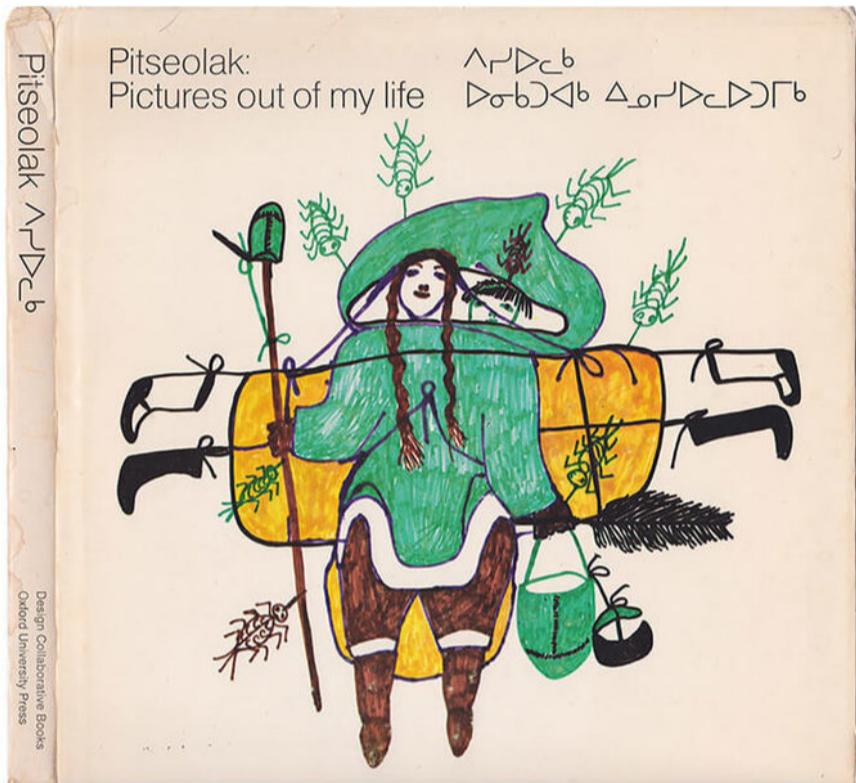
The Inuktitut transcript was revised by Ann Meekitjuk Hanson; Eber then edited the interviews into a narrative and wove in images drawn by Pitseolak during their sessions as well as selections of her best-known work to date. *Pictures Out of My Life* was published in both English and Inuktitut syllabics—a remarkable achievement, and a first for a publisher like Design Collaborative Books,



Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber at the presentation of *Pictures Out of My Life* at the National Library of Canada, Ottawa, 1971. Photograph by David Zimmerly.



working in conjunction with Oxford University Press. The book was a popular and critical success when it was launched in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto in October 1971. Pitseolak travelled south for events in these cities, and media coverage was extensive.²⁸



LEFT: The first edition of *Pictures Out of My Life*, published in 1971, features Pitseolak's *In summer there were always very big mosquitoes*, 1970, coloured felt-tip pen, 68.6 x 53.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: An undated newspaper clipping illustrates the wide press coverage surrounding the publication of *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*.

To date, *Pictures Out of My Life* remains the primary resource on the artist. It also provides personal insight into Inuit culture rather than the predominant anthropological perspective. Importantly, as one of the first autobiographical works from an Inuit artist, *Pictures Out of My Life* countered perceptions of Inuit as lacking in individuality and Inuit culture as being homogeneous.

The National Film Board of Canada made a film adaptation of *Pictures Out of My Life*.²⁹ It premiered at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on May 12, 1973, at the same time as the unveiling of an untitled wall-hanging by Jessie Oonark (1906–1985), a contemporary of Pitseolak's from Baker Lake. Jean Chrétien, then minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, opened the event with a speech; both Pitseolak and Jessie Oonark were in attendance.

In 1974 Pitseolak was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. Within two years, a retrospective exhibition was organized by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in partnership with the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. Simply titled *Pitseolak*, the exhibition included one hundred drawings dating from 1962 to 1974, the later ones made specifically for the show. It toured to three venues in Canada and then the Smithsonian Institution coordinated a tour to five venues in the United States that lasted until the summer of 1977. Also in 1977,



Jean Chrétien, Pitseolak Ashoona, and Jessie Oonark at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, 1973, at the unveiling of Oonark's untitled wall hanging (373 x 601 cm) and the screening of the film based on *Pictures Out of My Life*.



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

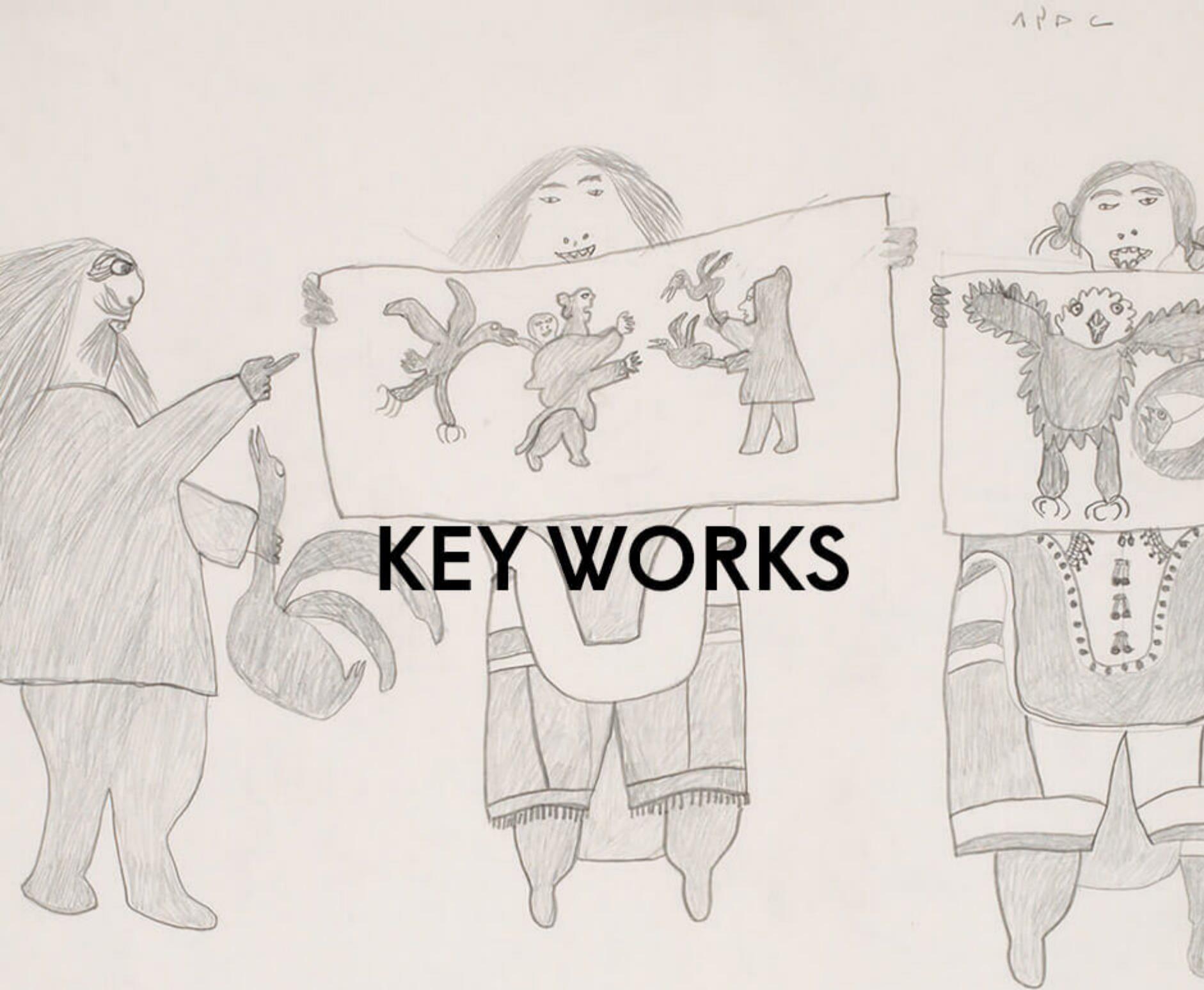
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Pitseolak received the Order of Canada for her contribution to Canadian visual arts and heritage.

This period of international attention and accolades was matched by an artistic flourishing that is reflected in the most exuberant drawings of Pitseolak's career. Over the next years, even as health concerns arose, she continued to work, providing a stable income for her extended family. After a brief illness, she died in Cape Dorset on May 28, 1983.



Pitseolak Ashoona in Cape Dorset, 1968. Photograph by Norman Hallendy.

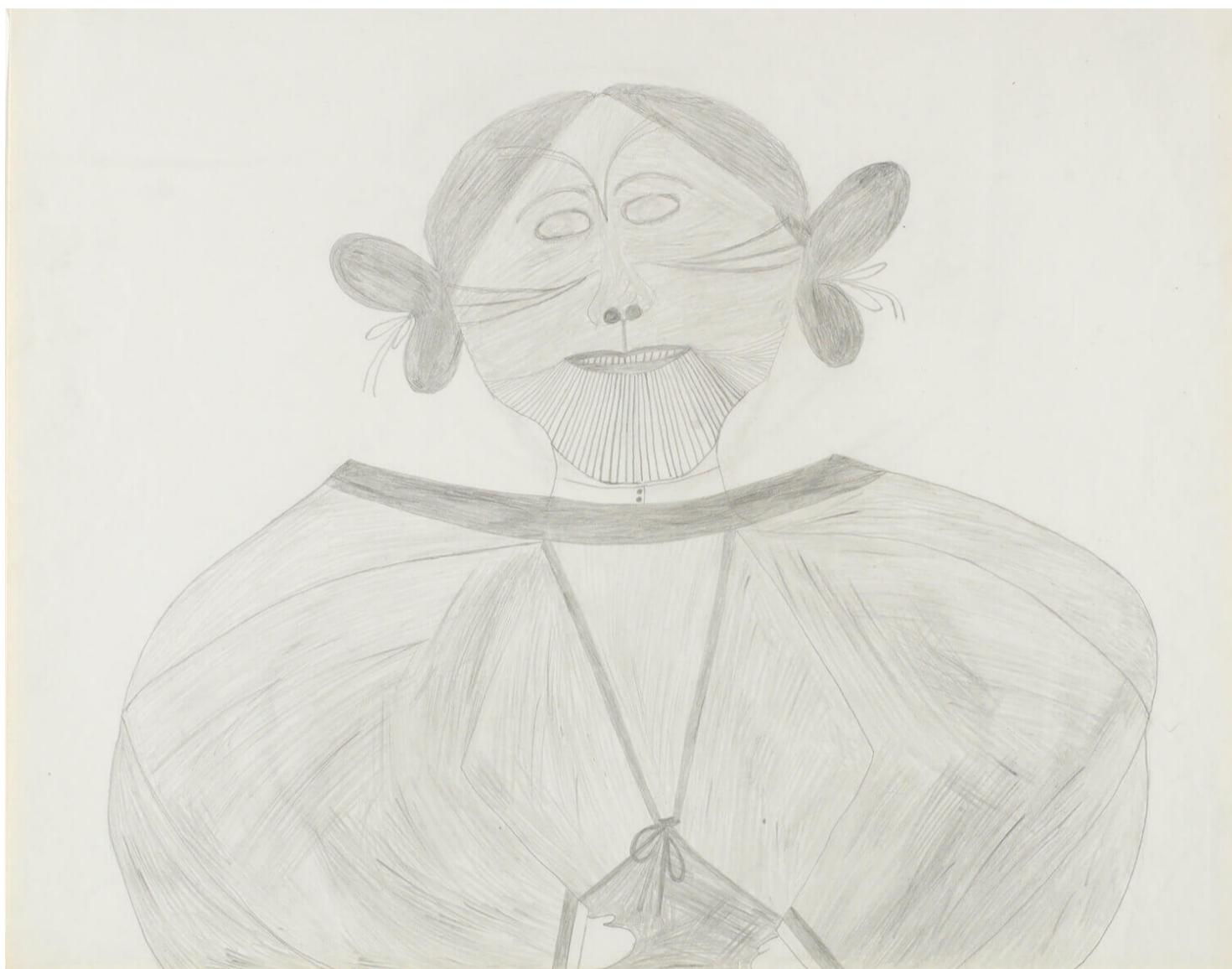


KEY WORKS

Pitseolak Ashoona produced a vast body of work beginning in the late 1950s, when she shifted from sewing to drawing, until her death in 1983. As she taught herself to draw, she often worked in series, both stylistic and thematic, until she achieved the effect she sought. The key works selected here are each outstanding in their execution and collectively reflect the full range of Pitseolak's ideas and achievements.



TATTOOED WOMAN 1960



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Tattooed Woman*, 1960

Graphite on paper

41.9 x 53.4 cm

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

By 1960 Pitseolak had already developed a level of confidence in her drawing, evident in this depiction of an Inuit woman with facial tattoos. She wears an *amauti*, a woman's parka with an extended hood in which a young child can be carried, nestled against its mother's back. With fluid lines, the artist conveys the bulky curves of the *amauti* as well as details—the complex ties across the front, the elaborate braided hairstyle, and the intricate facial tattoos.



Inuit in different regions, and even within communities or family groups, have their own style of *amauti*. The overall form of the garment and the linear patterns, usually in alternating bands of dark and light, have long been a source of pride for Inuit women.¹ Even the thinnest decorative bands must be both wind- and waterproof. Pitseolak was known for her exceptional sewing talent; having prepared the double-layer skin clothing for her family season after season, she had an intimate understanding of both the function and design of the *amauti* and was able to depict it concisely in a few drawn lines.



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Dream of Motherhood*, 1969, stonecut on japan paper, printed by Eegyvudluk Pootoogook, 62.2 x 87.9 cm. In this print the dominant female figure dreams of motherhood, pictured here as a woman holding an ulu knife and carrying a child in the hood of her *amauti*. RIGHT: Mary Ezekiel, a relative of Peter Pitseolak, carrying a child in her *amauti*, 1958. Photograph by Peter Pitseolak.

The *amauti* is deeply symbolic of motherhood, a valued role within Inuit culture. Pitseolak captures the sense of a mother's all-encompassing care in the way she emphasizes the full roundness of the hood and enfolded arms. Facial tattoos mark a woman's maturity, accomplishments, and place in Inuit society. Pitseolak recounts that her mother, Timungiak, had tattoos and describes how the marks were made with soot and caribou sinew.² According to Dorothy Harley Eber, whose interviews of the artist form the basis of *Pictures Out of My Life*, she later identified the woman in this image as her mother; *Tattooed Woman* can be viewed as an homage both to her mother and to Inuit women of earlier generations.³

Lukta Qiatsuk (1928-2004) translated Pitseolak's drawing into a stonecut print, retaining its crisp black and white imagery. It was published in the 1963 Cape Dorset annual print collection as *Tattooed Woman*; subsequently, it often appears in catalogues with the title spelled this way. As one of her earliest prints, made from a graphite line drawing and not yet indicative of the lively character for which she would later be recognized, this elegant image is nonetheless one of Pitseolak's best known and has become an icon of Canadian art.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Tattooed Woman*, 1963, stonecut on paper, printed by Lukta Qiatsuk, 75 x 62.2 cm.



THE CRITIC C. 1963



Pitseolak Ashoona, *The Critic*, c. 1963

Graphite on paper

47.6 x 61.1 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

The Critic is an early example of Pitseolak's commentary on the art world. The liveliness of her line drawing captures both the comedy and the awkwardness of this novel exchange of a bird for artwork. The excitement of the "buyer" (holding the bird by the neck) is expressed in his gestures and the agitated movement of his hair, while the two Inuit figures serenely hold up drawings, done in Pitseolak's style, for his selection. Her usual attention to detail is exhibited in the elaborately decorated clothing of the Inuit figures—no doubt based on her memories of sewing clothing for her family.



Many in the first wave of Inuit artists were unaware of the art world and did not consider themselves artists as such.¹ Pitseolak was an exception: she included images of her own drawings in her artwork, and she often spoke of herself as an artist. She was proud of her artistic accomplishments and at the same time amused: "Sometimes when I see pictures in books of my drawings and prints, I laugh. I laugh to think they have become something,"² she said. Drawings within drawings became a recurring theme in her work, yet they were never selected to be made into prints, and *The Critic* was not exhibited until her retrospective in 1975-77.

Pitseolak's interest in a form of artistic autobiography was shared with her daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938-2002), as seen in *Drawing of My Tent*, 1982, in which the artist holds up a drawing of a skin tent—much the way Pitseolak's figures hold up drawings in *The Critic*—while standing in front of her contemporary canvas tent. For Pitseolak, the autobiographical subject became a preoccupation, one that Napachie later expanded to self-portraits and portraits of her fellow artists working in the studio. This distinctive theme appears in more recent works by Pitseolak's granddaughters, the groundbreaking artists Annie Pootoogook (b. 1969) and Shuvinai Ashoona (b. 1961), and has been more widely explored by contemporary Inuit artists in general.



Napachie Pootoogook, *Drawing of My Tent*, 1982, stonecut and stencil on paper, printed by Qabaroak Qatsiya, 63.5 x 86.4 cm. Napachie created autobiographical images, as did her mother, Pitseolak.



Shuvinai Ashoona, *Pictures of My Drawings*, 2007, coloured pencil and ink on paper, 55.9 x 76.2 cm, private collection.



UNTITLED (BIRDS FLYING OVERHEAD) C. 1966-67



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Birds Flying Overhead)*, c. 1966-67

Coloured felt-tip pen on paper

65.6 x 50.5 cm

Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario



The image in *Untitled (Birds Flying Overhead)* is one that Pitseolak repeats in drawings throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, with many variations—a solitary woman sitting, running, or straining with both arms toward birds in the sky. Of her more than eight thousand drawings, more than half include birds as the primary subject in a multitude of contexts: the hunting of birds or the gathering of their eggs, fantastic and decorative birds, nesting birds and their young, winged human-birds, legends featuring birds, and often simply lone figures with birds. Birds as subject matter are well suited to Pitseolak's animated line, with which she conveys the spirited and quirky nature of different species. She relied more on her imagination than on naturalistic observation, however, allowing for endless creative possibilities.

Pitseolak's name may have given her a personal affinity for birds: "My name is Pitseolak, the Eskimo word for the sea pigeon. When I see pitseolaks over the sea, I say, There go those lovely birds—that's me, flying!" She continued, describing her work almost as a flock: "I don't know how many drawings I have done, but more than a thousand. There are many Pitseolaks now—I have signed my name many times."¹

More poignantly, her memories of the time following the death of her husband, Ashoona, hint at the depth of her feeling and her connection to birds:

When my husband died at Netsilik, even though I had relatives, it was as if my whole family had died.... When the geese were coming south and flying overhead down here past Cape Dorset, I used to think, "These geese have been with Ashoona back in Netsilik. They've been at Ashoona's grave." When it was really dark and I could hear the geese overhead, I'd go outside and I'd yell "Goodbye, goodbye!"²



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Fantastic Animals*, c. 1970, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 66.1 x 50.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Within this theme, many of Pitseolak's bird images convey a special interaction between women and birds. While men were gone for long periods hunting larger game, women could capture birds and gather eggs close to home to provide food for their families. The return of migratory birds in the spring was a time of rebirth and plenty. As mothers, women might have felt an affinity for the nesting birds and their young. Often Pitseolak would picture women's implements, such as an ulu, in a nest among the chicks.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Woman Attacked by Birds)*, c. 1966-76, wax crayon and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 38.6 x 46.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Bird and Woman)*, c. 1966-76, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.8 x 65.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Pitseolak portrayed both positive and negative interactions between women and birds.

Many of her drawings of birds were made into prints, and Pitseolak became known for her joyful depictions of fantastically coloured and vibrant creatures in flight.



INNUKSHUK BUILDERS 1968

Pitseolak Ashoona, *Innuksuk Builders*, 1968

Stonecut on paper

69.8 x 60.9 cm

Cape Dorset annual print collection 1968

One of Pitseolak's strongest compositions, this well-known print demonstrates the depth of personal and historical knowledge contained within images that often appear to be generic scenes of Inuit culture. Several years after Pitseolak created this image of three men building an inukshuk¹ (a stone marker), she identified the man placing the top stone as her father, Ottochie.² Pitseolak is remembering a specific time, when the men made an inukshuk on a hill behind the new settlement of Cape Dorset, established with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post in 1913. The inukshuk served as a beacon for the HBC supply ship, whose arrival in Cape Dorset was a major event. Hunters stood



watch day and night at the inukshuk and fired shots in the air to announce the approaching ship.³ Inuit would travel from outlying camps to assist in offloading supplies. It was also a joyful occasion for sharing news and for family reunions and other gatherings.

Even before this time, inuksuit (the plural of inukshuk) figured prominently in Cape Dorset oral histories and legends, and later, in the visual arts; they appear in almost all of Pitseolak's landscapes and camp scenes. For families such as Pitseolak's, who made the crossing from Nunavik (Arctic Quebec) to Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island), the inuksuit at Tikivak and the Inuksugaluit point were a welcome beacon at the end of the journey.⁴

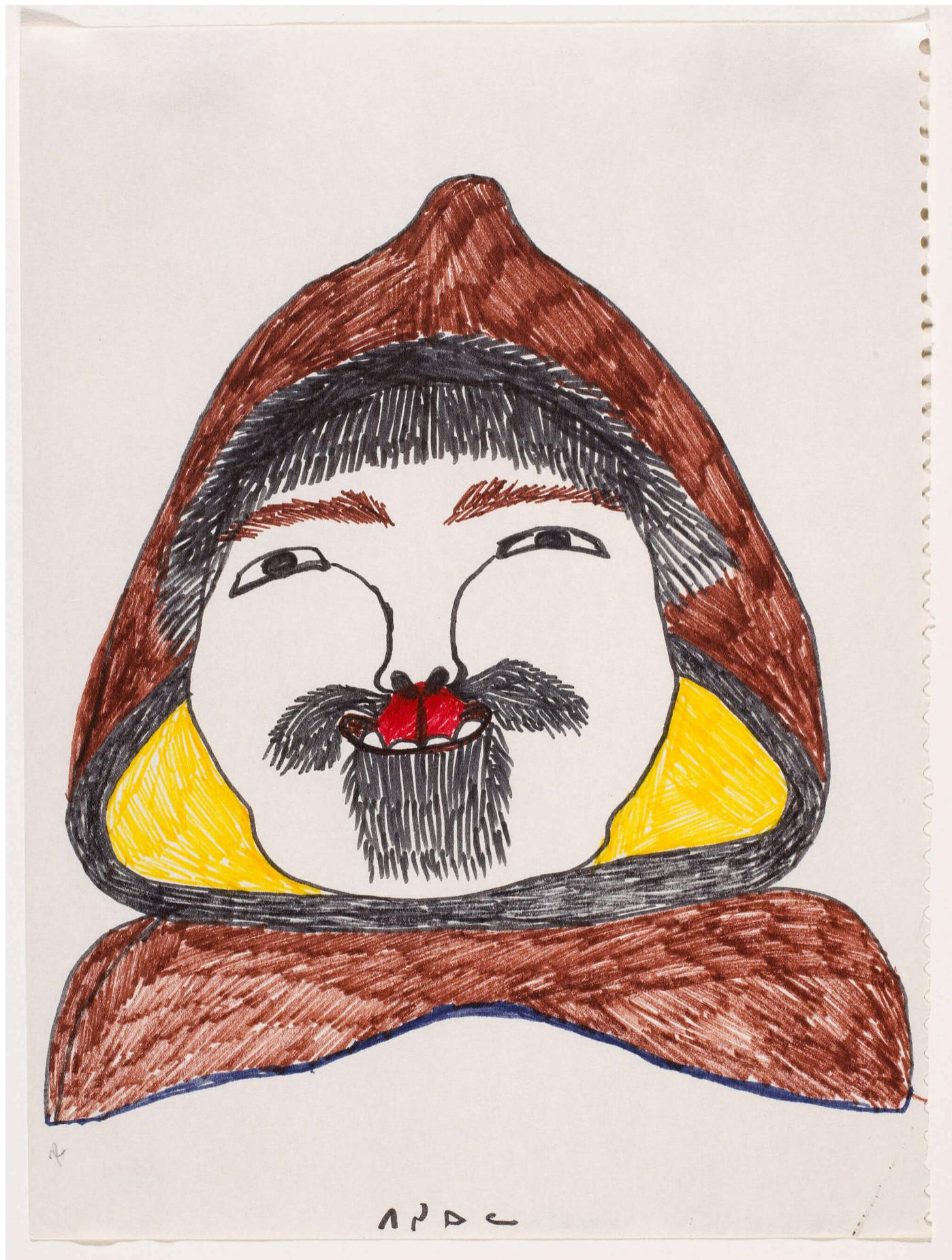


LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966–76, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 43.9 x 36 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. RIGHT: Inuit cairn on the limestone plateau at the northern tip of Baffin Island, 1929. Photograph by J. Dewey Soper.

Pitseolak's drawing for *Innuksuk Builders* was selected for the annual Cape Dorset collection and made into a print. It became a popular image, though its personal and historical context was not widely known until much later. In the 1960s, when Inuit images were widely regarded as depictions of "old ways," Pitseolak was aware that her drawings introduced an outside audience to the Inuit way of life, and equally conscious that she was recording knowledge for future generations of Inuit. This didactic motivation may have been paramount in her mind and would explain why she felt it unnecessary to identify individuals more clearly in her art. Pitseolak's images suggest greater emphasis on depicting a shared history—an approach prevalent among the first generation of Inuit artists—rather than a need to convey a specific individual experience.



PORTRAIT OF ASHOONA C. 1970



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Portrait of Ashoona*, c. 1970

Coloured felt-tip pen on paper

27.6 x 20.5 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

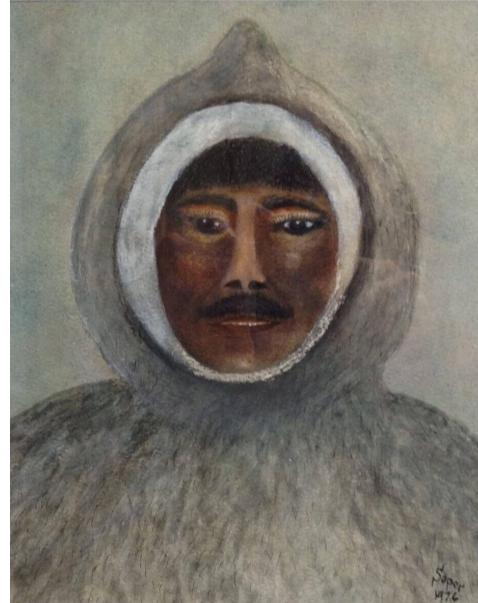


Pitseolak's exceptional portrait of her husband, Ashoona, counters the misconception widely held in the 1950s and 1960s that Inuit artists did not create images of themselves or other individuals. Although no syllabics have been added to the drawing that identify the subject, the distinctive moustache and beard suggest it is a specific person. Pitseolak's son Namoonie later confirmed to the writer Dorothy Harley Eber that his mother had intended this as a portrait of Ashoona.¹

A photograph of Ashoona by J. Dewey Soper taken in the 1920s allows for a comparison with the figure in Pitseolak's drawing.

Although the photograph depicts Ashoona as a younger, beardless man, Pitseolak's figure has similarities in the eyes and brow. Beyond the physical representation, Pitseolak has also captured Ashoona's character—his playful gesture of touching his tongue to his nose. In this humorous detail the portrait tells more about Ashoona than the photographic likeness does.

As much as drawn portraits capture the likeness of the sitter, they also reveal something about the artist. Pitseolak's portrait of Ashoona communicates her feelings toward her husband, who died in the early to mid-1940s, long before she became an artist. In her portraits, as in her camp scenes and landscapes, Pitseolak found a way to re-experience the past and, in particular, a way to remember loved ones.



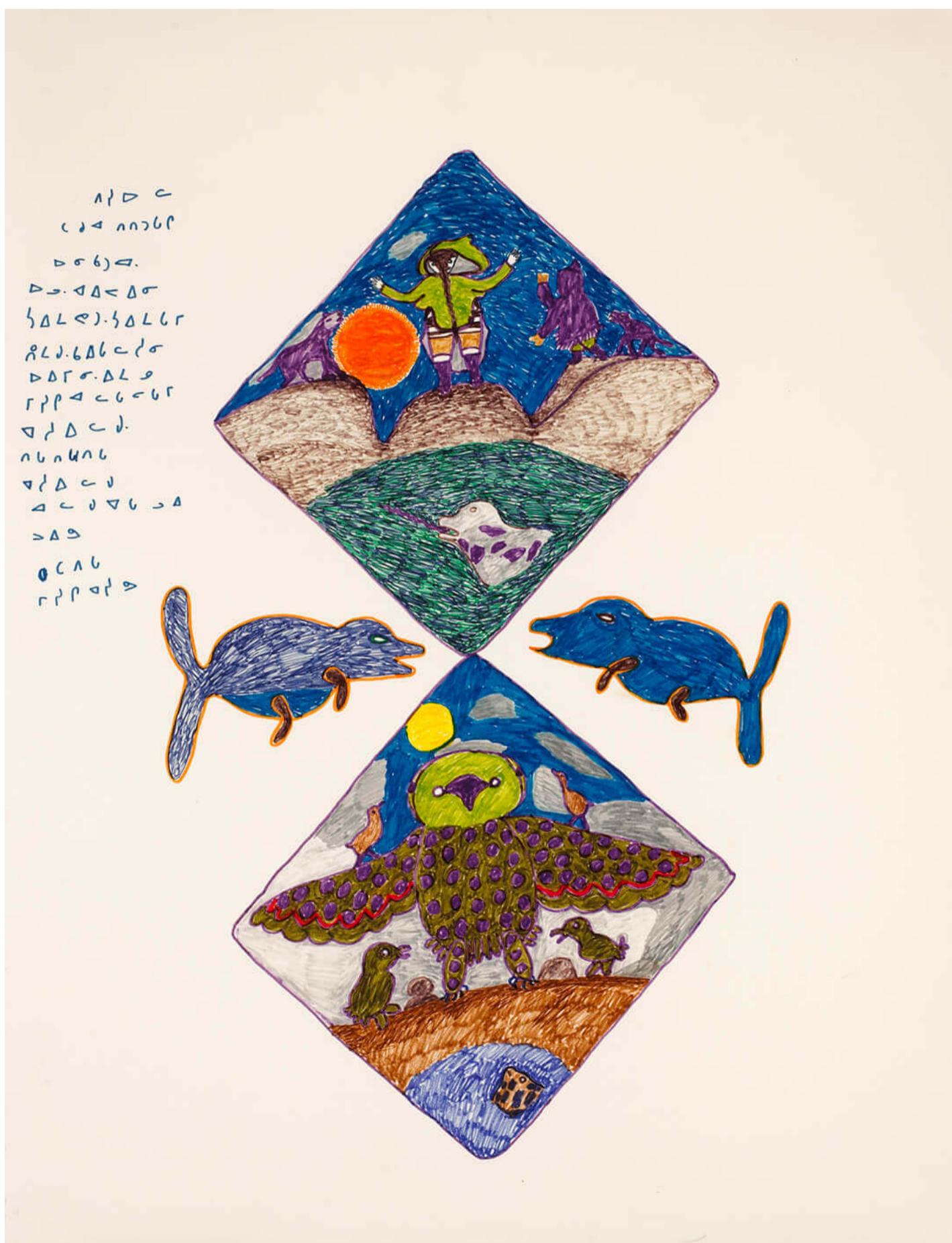
J. Dewey Soper, *Portrait of My Guide, Baffin Island*, 1976, watercolour on paper, Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary. Soper added Ashoona's characteristic moustache, absent from the photograph but featured prominently in Pitseolak's drawing of her husband.



Portrait of Ashoona taken when he was a guide for J. Dewey Soper, 1929. Photograph by J. Dewey Soper. Soper's 1976 watercolour of Ashoona is based on this photograph.



LEGEND OF THE WOMAN WHO TURNED INTO A NARWHAL C. 1974



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Legend of the Woman Who Turned into a Narwhal*, c. 1974

Coloured felt-tip pen on paper

66 x 50.7 cm

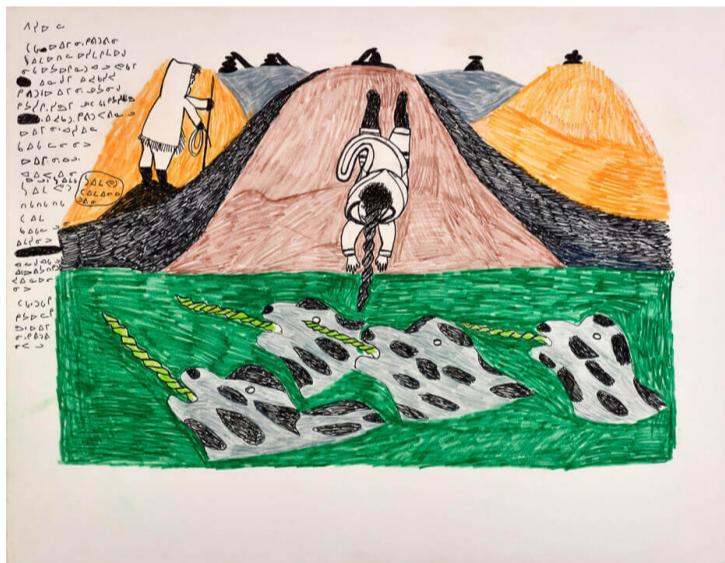
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



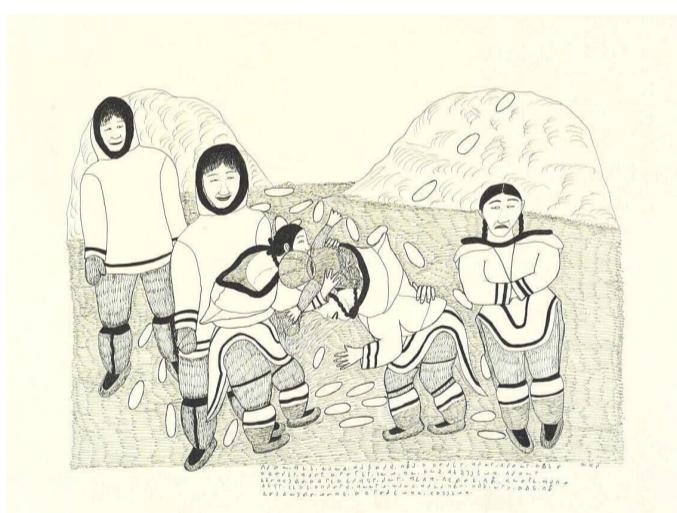
Pitseolak occasionally drew on the legends she heard in her youth, particularly from her father, Ottochie. This gem-like drawing has all the hallmarks of her work—Inuit and animals in a landscape setting, portrayed in rich colour and using a vibrant line. Here Pitseolak experiments with unusual compositional devices, placing the scenes within diamond-shaped frames and balancing these one on top of the other.

The scene in the upper part of the drawing depicts a critical moment in the story of the woman who became a narwhal. Pitseolak's version may be a variation from Nunavik (Arctic Quebec), where her father's family originated, with her own personal emphasis.¹ Along the side she writes the following in syllabics: "These are Pitseolak's drawings. Every few days she would manage to be patient enough from the beatings she received from her husband. One day by the sea she was about to be beaten again. So she prepared to jump into the sea. At that moment all the narwhals rose to the surface of the water in front of her."²

To escape her husband's abuse, the woman jumps off a cliff; she does not die but is instead transformed into a narwhal. Pitseolak depicts the moment of transformation that saves the woman, with her long braid twisting into the tusk of a narwhal.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, 1976, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 51.4 x 66.7 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This work shows the woman in the legend diving into the sea.



Napachie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak's Hardships #2*, 1999-2000, black felt-tip pen on paper, 51 x 66.2 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Pitseolak's daughter Napachie drew on various aspects of camp life, including scenes of domestic abuse.

Pitseolak retells a legend in her drawing, but her focus on this version of the story is a rare instance of her depicting one of the hardships that she and many other women faced in camp life. Her daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938-2002), was aware of her mother's circumstances, even illustrating an incident in *Pitseolak's Hardships #2*, 1999-2000, in which her mother was beaten while another person attempted to take her first child. Pitseolak herself, however, never revealed such experiences either in her art or in interviews with individuals outside of the community.



SUMMER CAMP SCENE C. 1974



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974

Coloured felt-tip pen on paper

50.6 x 65.4 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

This exceptional drawing exhibits the naturalistic detail and joyful expression for which Pitseolak became celebrated. It reflects her at the fullness of her artistic achievements.



After years of practice, Pitseolak developed the ability to place her figures in the landscape. In *Summer Camp Scene*, a family at their camp and approaching travellers are settled between two hills; the figures are shown as both inhabiting the landscape and integrated into it. Through her observation and gradual experimentation, Pitseolak successfully communicates the layered and hilly terrain around Cape Dorset–Kinngait, the Inuktitut name for Cape Dorset, means “big hills.” Another Inuk stands on the lookout for sea animals, his harpoon ready, and is accompanied by some of the birds that migrate in the thousands to Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island) in the warmer seasons. With her attention to detail, Pitseolak carefully records the tent made from skins of square flipper seals, the pack that the dog carries, and the man’s hunting implements. *Pitsik* (dried fish) hangs between the two tents where women enjoy an idle moment in conversation.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Camping*, c. 1960–65, graphite on paper, 48.5 x 64 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This is one of Pitseolak’s early attempts to situate figures and tents in a landscape, a scene that she repeats and perfects in the drawing *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974.

Many of Pitseolak’s drawings, including *Summer Camping*, c. 1960–65, communicate the essence of camp life, embodying the Inuit sensibility of community and cooperation. Pitseolak was concerned not only with depicting the practical knowledge of the “old ways” but also with recording the less physically tangible values that accompanied traditional life, such as the importance of sharing everything from work tasks to food and shelter.

Remarkably, in *Summer Camp Scene* Pitseolak creates this dense scene with a limited range of colours—browns, grey, and olive green, enlivened by touches of yellow and turquoise-blue. As with many works created with felt-tip marker, the colours have faded somewhat, such as the olive green of the tundra, yet they still convey the artist’s love of colour and reflect her memories of summer on the land.



DRAWING FOR PRINT MEMORIES OF CHILDBIRTH 1976

Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *Memories of Childbirth*, 1976

Coloured felt-tip pen on paper

24.1 x 35.6 cm

Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario

In this original drawing for the print *Memories of Childbirth*, Pitseolak shows a woman in labour, kneeling and surrounded by three women who hold her hands and support her back. The syllabics read "Pitseolak" and "Here she is about to give birth." In *Pictures Out of My Life* (1971), Pitseolak recounts, "When Namoonie, my first son, was born, three women held me."¹

The ambiguous placement of her name on the drawing makes it unclear whether Pitseolak is signing the work or is referring to herself as the woman giving birth in the image. This ambiguity appears accidental but may instead reflect a way of representing the self. Here, although Pitseolak recalls her own life, she does not openly express this in terms such as "this is me" or "this happened to me." Rather, her personal experience is translated into an image of how Inuit women traditionally gave birth.



As an elder in the close-knit camps, one who had lived most of her life on the land before moving to Cape Dorset and becoming an artist, Pitseolak vacillated between depicting her personal experiences and depicting those she shared with women in general. Calling attention to oneself, particularly for women, was not encouraged in traditional camp society.² In addition, childbirth was surrounded by rigid societal taboos.³ Pitseolak tackles such subjects in her images of women's daily experiences and of practices such as midwifery, thus recording the cultural knowledge of Inuit women.⁴



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Memories of Childbirth*, 1976, stonecut on paper, printed by Timothy Ottochie, 43.4 x 63.5 cm. In *Pictures Out of My Life*, Pitseolak recounts, "When my first son was born three women held me. It was like that in old times—there would always be women who helped. Afterwards they would make magic wishes for the child—that a boy would be a good hunter, that a girl should have long hair, and that a child should do well at whatever they were doing."

The original drawing was made into a print in 1976, but the print was not approved by the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, the body of experts that juried all prints from the government-funded print studios. It was finally released in 1994 and included in the exhibition *Cape Dorset Revisited* at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, and as part of a special edition alongside the annual Cape Dorset print collection.⁵ This late release may reflect a change in attitudes and a greater interest in and acceptance of subject matter relating to women's experiences.



THE SHAMAN'S WIFE 1980



Pitseolak Ashoona, *The Shaman's Wife*, 1980

Stonecut and stencil on paper

71 x 50.5 cm

Cape Dorset annual print collection 1980



In this gripping image Pitseolak strikes a balance between the familiar and the otherworldly. The figure of the shaman's wife boldly faces the viewer and exudes a powerful sense of mystery, yet equal attention is given to the details of her traditional clothing and facial tattoos.

By 1980 the Cape Dorset printmakers excelled at the stonecut print and were able to capture the quality of Pitseolak's energetic line. The linear outline in the print, not easy to accomplish, is in keeping with her original drawing. Even the texture of the sealskin clothing and the pattern of the facial tattoos appear to be active, true to Pitseolak's interest in conveying movement throughout her artworks.

The woman sits in a meditative pose with arms tucked into sleeves and legs crossed. Her mouth is slightly distorted, and her eyes are turned up as if she is in a trance. On top of her head is a bird—a prevalent feature in Pitseolak's art—which in this instance likely represents the shaman's spirit helper. A shaman in a trance was believed capable of seeing through the eyes of the spirit helper and could therefore assist hunters in locating game.



LEFT: Napachie Pootoogook, *Aliguq's Seaweed Spirits*, 1996–97, black felt-tip pen and coloured pencil on paper, 66.1 x 50.8 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1962–64, blue felt-tip pen on paper, 35.1 x 41.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

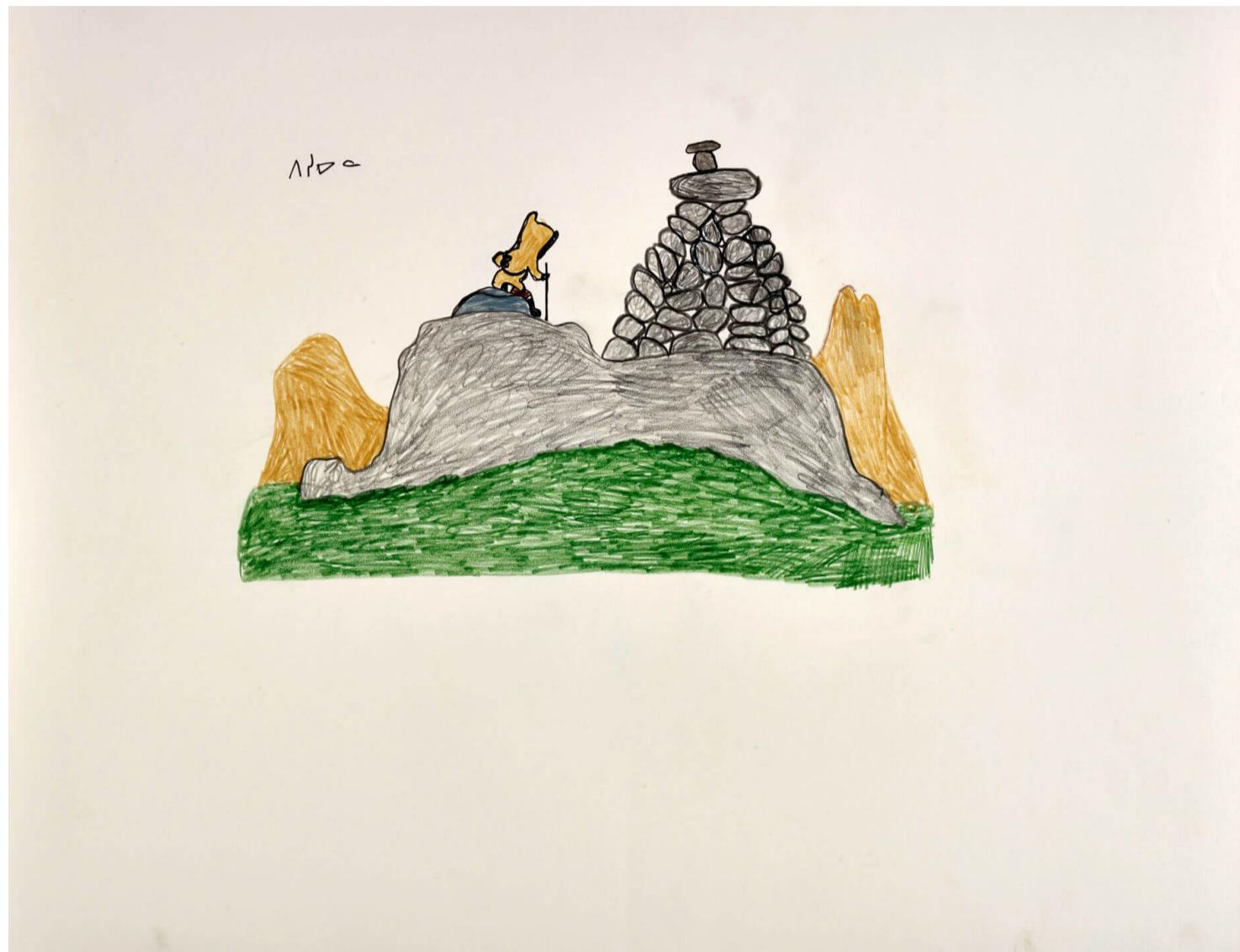
Shamanic practices appear in very few of Pitseolak's works, largely in her earliest drawings and in the form of fantastic demon-like creatures. By the 1920s Pitseolak had converted to Christianity. In *Pictures Out of My Life* (1971), she admits she knew little about shamans, though she recalls that her father, Ottokie, was almost killed by one and that her family believed in their existence.¹



No evidence suggests that Pitseolak is depicting a specific shamanic ritual in this image. However, it is interesting to speculate on the continuity of thought that persists after a belief system is, at least to outside knowledge, no longer practised. Pitseolak's daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938-2002), later created a series of drawings of shamans, including one of Aliguq, a female shaman with the same distinctive facial tattoos as the figure in *The Shaman's Wife*. Aliguq's husband, Alariaq, was also known to possess special powers and was related to Pitseolak. When she was a child, Pitseolak heard stories about Aliguq from her parents and others, as the shaman couple was well known in the Cape Dorset area, and she later shared these with her own children.²



UNTITLED (SOLITARY FIGURE ON THE LANDSCAPE) C. 1980



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Solitary Figure on the Landscape)*, c. 1980

Coloured pencil on paper

51.4 x 66.5 cm

Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario

This drawing is a particularly eloquent example of Pitseolak's later work. Her drawings from the early 1980s—the last years of her life—are on a smaller scale and use a restrained palette of grey, green, and tan. These images convey a deep sense of quietness, a distillation of her preferred subjects, but are no less engaging than her earlier work.



Pitseolak continued to draw in these final years: "After my husband died I felt very alone and unwanted; making prints [drawings] is what has made me happiest since he died. I am going to keep on doing them until they tell me to stop. If no one tells me to stop, I shall make them as long as I am well. If I can, I'll make them even after I am dead,"¹ she said.

In style and tone, *Solitary Figure on the Landscape* differs from her well-known work of the 1970s. The solitary figure of a woman sits contemplating the stone cairn in the landscape. Gone is the exuberance of people and animals engaged in a multitude of activities in camps or travelling across the land. Pitseolak evokes a mood of tranquility tinged with nostalgia. The focus is on the woman with her walking stick and the cairn. The likelihood is that Pitseolak is once again reflecting on her own life and that the cairn is the grave marker for her husband, Ashoona, which still stands at Netsilik.



Pitseolak in Cape Dorset, c. 1975. Photograph by Tessa Macintosh.

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Pitseolak Ashoona's body of work, its range and depth, was achieved through two decades of diligent effort and considerable creative energy. One of the first Inuit to create images of traditional life, Pitseolak contributed to the establishment of a modern Inuit art form that has received worldwide popular and commercial success. At the same time, her artworks play a vital role in the transmission of Inuit traditional knowledge and values. Beyond her own accomplishments, she has influenced generations of Inuit artists, leaving an important and lasting legacy.



INUIT ART PIONEER

Pitseolak Ashoona was part of the first generation to make modern Inuit art—the most recent stage in the distinct aesthetic expression of the Inuit people, which can be traced back for millennia in Arctic Canada to the Sivullirmiut (first peoples) and Thule (ancestors of Inuit). In the mid-twentieth century, the art forms of sculpture, drawings and prints, and works on cloth were introduced to Inuit as economic initiatives, with the support of various governmental agencies. The art forms were as unprecedented as the tangle of complex circumstances evolving during this period of accelerated change caused by government intervention in the North. The critical and commercial success of contemporary Inuit art rests on the foundation built during this time by artists of Pitseolak's generation.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Wanderers Watch Woman Scraping Hide*, 1961, stonecut on paper, printed by Iyola Kingwatsiaq, 46.1 x 61 cm.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Festive Bird*, 1970, stonecut on paper, printed by Kananginak Pootoogook, 60.8 x 85.2 cm.

The popularity of the Cape Dorset prints, in particular, across Canada and internationally, contributed to the growing interest in Inuit art in the 1960s and 1970s. Pitseolak's artwork, in its portrayal of Inuit culture and its aesthetic appeal, helped place Inuit art firmly within the Canadian psyche through widespread exhibitions and reproductions in publications. Within a broader art history, though rarely noted, the success of the prints based on drawings by Pitseolak and her contemporaries contributed significantly to the printmaking revival that took place throughout Canada in the 1970s.



INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is an Inuktitut phrase used to describe the knowledge and values passed down through generations as "things we have always known, things crucial to our survival."¹ Pitseolak's drawings are important for their transmission of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, as well as for the pride they instill in a shared Inuit heritage within her community. Pitseolak understood art's communicative power and was conscious that her drawings presented the intellectual, spiritual, and material culture of the Inuit to the rest of Canada and the world. The didactic quality of her art was motivated by her desire to teach others, non-Inuit and future generations of Inuit alike, about the life she experienced first-hand.

Attesting to this, her son Kiugak Ashoona (1933-2014) observed, "My mother's drawings show exactly the lifestyle we lived as Inuit in the Netsilik area."² Likewise, in *Pictures Out of My Life* (1971), she spends much time describing how Inuit lived and the wide range of necessary skills, from making skin clothing, kayaks, and shelters to catching birds.

Pitseolak chose not to dwell on the harsher side of camp life or the difficult transition to sedentary life in Arctic communities. Contemporary Inuit artists have begun to provide social and political commentary, but in Pitseolak's time, artists instead focused on the strengths of traditional camp society and thereby transmitted knowledge that they were concerned might otherwise disappear.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Moving Camp*, c. 1971, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 51.8 x 66.3 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Winter Camping*, c. 1966-76, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.8 x 65.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Dogs rest at the entrance to a newly built igloo; a qamutiq (dog sled) stands upright in the upper left.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

The iconic cultural images created by the first Inuit artists quickly became themes that were carried forward by following generations. Pitseolak contributed to the establishment of this visual vocabulary, but she also laid the groundwork for the exploration of new subject matter through her autobiographical artworks. This critical influence can be traced through her daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938-2002), to her granddaughter Annie Pootoogook (1969-2016), whose own autobiographical work has redefined contemporary Inuit art.

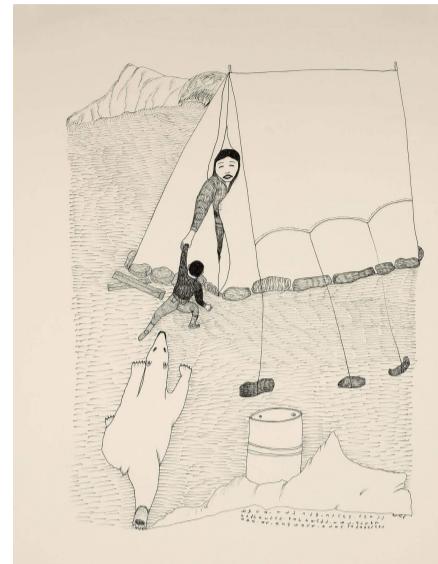


A common perception of Inuit art from Pitseolak's era is that the artists did not represent themselves or their families or events from their own lives. During her first decade as an artist, Pitseolak had a reputation for depicting the "old ways"; although her work was culturally specific and accurate, there was no expectation that she was referring to personal experience. With the publication of *Pictures Out of My Life* in 1971, her drawings were recognized for the first time for their autobiographical content. By the end of her life her reputation for this content was firmly established. The leading art historian and former Winnipeg Art

Gallery curator Jean Blodgett notes this new perspective in *Grasp Tight the Old Ways* (1983): "Many Pitseolak works are imbued with a strong personal element illustrating actual people and events as she remembers them from her past."³



Pitseolak Ashoona, *The Eyes of a Happy Woman*, c. 1974, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 66.2 x 51 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Napachie Pootoogook, *Untitled (Napachie Saving Nujaliaq)*, c. 1997-98, black felt-tip pen on paper, 66 x 50.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The intimacy in Pitseolak's images is a large part of their appeal. Yet her drawings are ambiguous; there is rarely an obvious reference to her life. It may be that she represented herself differently from how a Western artist approaches self-representation. The reasons for this are twofold: first, as an artist, Pitseolak was encouraged by James Houston (1921-2005) and the growing market for "exotic" images of Inuit life to create representations that focused on a collective rather than an individual identity; and second, her concept of self was expressed differently from a sense of self informed by modern Western individualism.



Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *Eskimos on Sealskin Boat*, c. 1966-72, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 66.4 x 51.4 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This drawing of a group of women and children in an umiak and a man in a kayak was used on the cover of the second edition of *Pictures Out of My Life*, published in 2003.



For centuries, in the close-knit extended family groups of the camps, identity was shaped in large part by sharing and by naming practices. Strong bonds to others reinforced a sense of cohesive identity that was important to maintaining harmonious relations. Reflecting this, Pitseolak's drawings, such as *Eskimos on Sealskin Boat*, c. 1966-72, though autobiographical, depict group activities without giving prominence to any one individual. Instead of communicating events as "this happened to me," her images are presented as shared history—"this happened to us"—yet without denying her identity. From the outside, a collective society could be assumed to lead to anonymity; arguably, however, individuals in small communities tend to have a stronger sense of self than those in large urban centres.

BECOMING AN ARTIST

As one of the first artists to make drawings for the print studio in Cape Dorset in the early 1960s, Pitseolak had no instructors and few examples of artwork on paper to follow. Promotional booklets such as *Canadian Eskimo Art* by James Houston (1921-2005), published in 1964 by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, indicated which types of art sold well in the market, but there was little or no information on techniques or pictorial devices. Visiting artists offered some training in specific media—such as in the early 1960s Alexander Wyse (b. 1938) introduced engraving in Cape Dorset, and in the late 1970s K.M. Graham (1913-2008) encouraged artists to explore the use of acrylics—but rarely did Inuit of Pitseolak's generation have the opportunity to study art techniques or methods. Instead, Pitseolak worked out solutions to artistic problems—such as how to convey the movement of figures or place them within a landscape—through what can be described as a self-directed program of repetitious drawings. "Does it take much planning to draw? Ahalona! It takes much thinking, and I think it is hard to think. It is hard like housework,"⁴ she said.

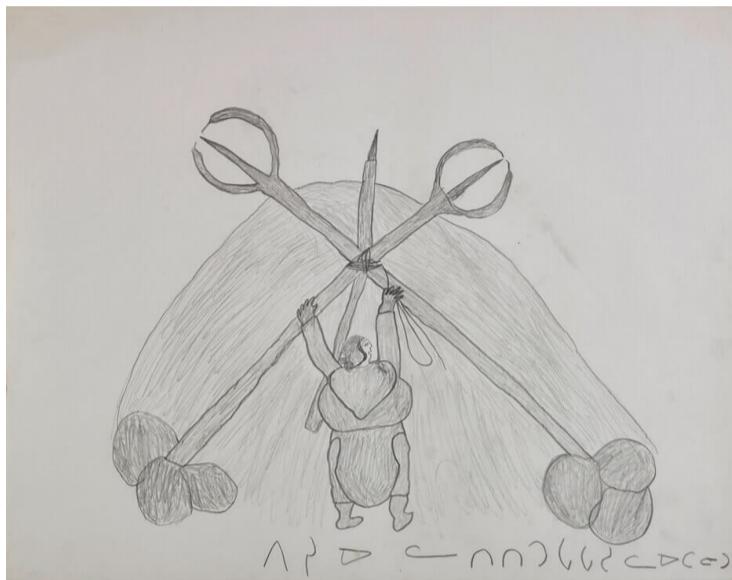


Inuit artists of the Cape Dorset co-operative, 1961. From left, top row: Napachie Pootoogook, Pudlo Pudlat; bottom row: Egevadluq Ragee, Kenojuak Ashevak, Lucy Qinnuayuak, Pitseolak Ashoona, Kiakshuk, Parr. Photograph by B. Korda.

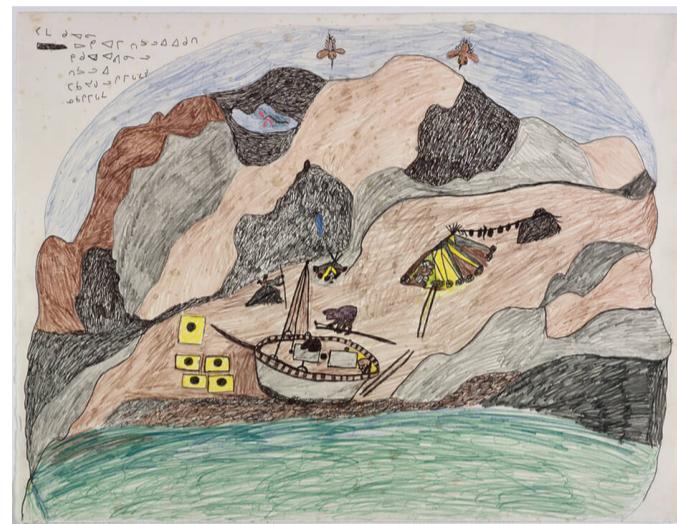
For centuries leading up to and including Pitseolak's own lifetime, Inuit made and perfected everything they needed for survival—from tools to sleds to shelter—through invention and adaptation of the material resources at hand. This required innovation through trial and error, through a process of learning by experimenting and hands-on practice. Inuit artists of Pitseolak's generation



had a similar approach to their artmaking; they proved to be resourceful, experimenting to find solutions that worked—though the process was complicated by there being no measurable, physical function with art. The ingrained experimental approach allowed them to excel in diverse media. Each artist had to invent his or her own style to convey ideas, which is reflected in the wide stylistic range and the directness of expression that typifies Inuit art.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1959–65, graphite on paper, 47.9 x 60.7 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. In this humorous drawing, a woman uses gigantic *kakivak* (fish spears) as tent poles.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, 1981, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 51.2 x 66.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This is one of several drawings of ships, most likely based on the schooner *Bowdoin*, that Pitseolak completed near the end of her life.

Unlike many Inuit artists who work solely within a style established early in their careers, Pitseolak followed a process of continuous experimentation, from early roughed-out drawings with an emphasis on line, to flamboyant well-composed scenes in rich colour, to the more subdued and refined quality of her last works.

Working largely outside of Western art traditions, Inuit artists were categorized as “naïve” or “primitive” in their style and approaches to making art, as in a 1969 description of Cape Dorset drawings as “childlike drawings in nursery colours... like innocent documentary.”⁵ Countering such clichés, Pitseolak’s self-directed efforts toward developing her visual expression were consistent with those of an artist with formal arts training and brought recognition to the validity of Inuit systems of learning.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Voyage*, 1971, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 68.6 x 53.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



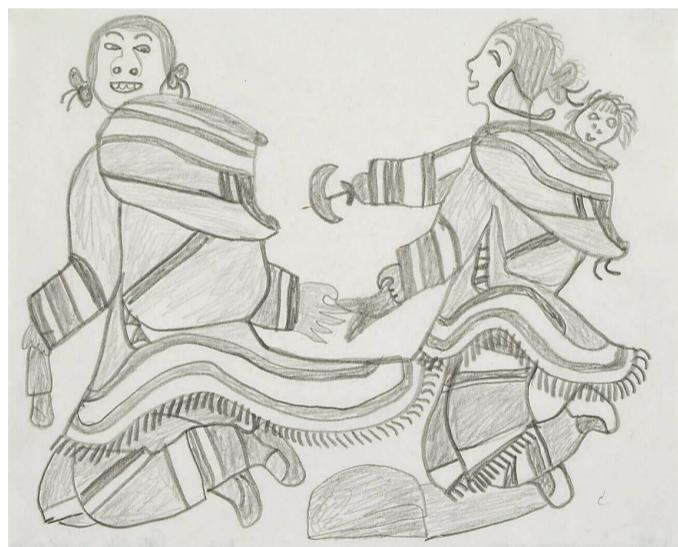
INUIT WOMEN AS ARTISTS

Inuit women were readily accepted as artists in northern communities and among the supporters of the new art forms, such as James Houston (1921–2005), Alma Houston (1926–1997), and Terrence Ryan (1933–2017) in Cape Dorset; and art galleries in cities across Canada and internationally. Because there were no preconceived ideas about how artmaking fit within traditional gender divisions of labour, women were able to participate actively in new economic ventures through arts and crafts programs.⁶ Women were empowered by becoming artists, and by their new roles as visual historians and breadwinners in the changing Inuit society.

Representations of women and their activities by male artists provide a male perspective and often convey an objective respect. Only the images of women by women, however, can be said to give voice to female identity. The visual history of Inuit culture would be incomplete without the contributions of artists such as Pitseolak. Her images of women's tools, motherhood, and domestic scenes illuminate the role of women within Inuit society.



Kiakshuk, *Woman Scraping Seal Skin*, 1961, stonecut on paper, 30.2 x 47.2 cm. Kiakshuk depicts a woman working with her ulu knife.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Women Gutting Fish*, c. 1960–65, graphite on paper, 20.8 x 25.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. In drawings such as this one, Pitseolak shows how women often shared tasks and enjoyed working together.

In traditional Inuit culture the clear delineation of activities and a person's ability to perform tasks—such as hunting, for men, and sewing, for women—reinforced the sense of self in the larger community. Pitseolak's many images of women at work are more than a visual record of the tasks depicted. Through them, she communicates the vitality and strength of Inuit women. She expresses the camaraderie of women sharing tasks, as they depended on each other while the men were absent on hunting trips, often for long periods. This camaraderie is shown in works such as *Women Gutting Fish*, c. 1960–65.



Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1966-76, wax crayon and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 45.7 x 61.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966-76, wax crayon and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.8 x 65.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. A collection of women's tools, from the ulu knife (front centre) to the drying rack (top right).

Pitseolak's images of women's implements are carefully organized to demonstrate and share her knowledge of these tools. In many drawings, her depictions of the ulu, the woman's knife, and other tools, become a metaphor for woman, reflecting how closely an Inuit woman's identity is bound up in her work.

Inuit women of Pitseolak's generation typically gave birth to many children; she herself had seventeen. Not surprising then, her work strongly reflects the importance of motherhood to female identity. Children are ever present as women perform their daily activities, as seen in *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974.

The peak of Pitseolak's artistic production, in the mid-1970s, coincided with the international women's movement and a questioning of the gender inequality evident in the arts. In this context, Pitseolak was celebrated for her role and influence as a leading artist and a matriarch within a family of artists. A decade after her death, Canada Post included her portrait in a series of stamps honouring Canadian women and issued on International Women's Day in 1993.



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.6 x 65.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Pitseolak was one of four Canadian women featured on a series of postage stamps released in 1993. The other three were Helen Alice Kinnear, Adelaide Hoodless, and Marie-Joséphine Gérin-Lajoie.



THE ASHOONA LEGACY

Motivated at least in part by memories of the destitute years following the death of her husband, Ashoona, Pitseolak encouraged her children to take up artmaking, either drawing or carving. Through her example she instilled in them the drive to excel as artists by challenging themselves technically and stylistically. It is not by chance that all of her sons took up stone carving with a steady work ethic. In 1953 Qaqaq Ashoona (1928–1996) and Kiugak Ashoona (1933–2014) were included in the landmark exhibition organized by the London art gallery Gimpel Fils to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II—the exhibition that introduced Inuit art to England. Both artists had lifelong careers and are recognized today as master carvers.



LEFT: Qaqaq Ashoona, *Bust of a Woman Holding "Ajuktaut" Racquet*, c. 1977, stone, 32.8 x 32.1 x 23.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Kumwartok Ashoona, *Head of a Woman*, c. 1960–69, 8.7 x 14.9 x 20.3 cm, green stone, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This sculpture by Pitseolak's son bears a remarkable resemblance to Pitseolak and is likely a portrait of her.

Pitseolak had a close relationship with her only daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002), and they often drew together. Stylistically Napachie learned from her mother's efforts, and some of her drawings from the 1960s are almost interchangeable with those by Pitseolak. Interestingly, after her mother's death in 1983, Napachie's style changed and began to move in new directions.

Pitseolak's encouragement extended to her daughters-in-law: Sorosilutu Ashoona (b. 1941) remarked, "My husband's mother asked me quite a few times to draw. She's the one who really started me drawing—me and her two other daughter-in-laws—Mayureak [Mayureak Ashoona (b. 1946)] and Mary. They draw too because of her."⁷



Kiugak Ashoona, *Untitled (Childhood Dream)*, 1980–81, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 51.1 x 65.8 cm. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Kiugak is widely known for his sculpture, but he also made drawings for the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. The syllabics at left read: "When I was a boy I thought I would hold onto the *aku* (tail) of my mother's parka when she went to heaven."



Sorosilutu Ashoona, *Kaliviktato/Skipping*, 1976, stonecut and stencil on paper, printed by Qabaroak Qatsiya, 62.3 x 86.4 cm. Sorosilutu was encouraged to draw by Pitseolak, her mother-in-law.

From Pitseolak's lead, the Ashoona name became synonymous with artistic excellence; recognition came as early as 1967, in the exhibition *Carvings and Prints of the Family of Pitseolak* held at the Robertson Galleries in Ottawa and including one hundred artworks. In his introduction to the 1979 Cape Dorset annual collection, James Houston (1921–2005) noted: "In Pitseolak we have the nucleus of a remarkable artistic family whose members play an important part in the artwork of Cape Dorset."⁸

Pitseolak's artistic legacy continues through Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016), Goota Ashoona (b. 1967), and Shuvinai Ashoona (b. 1961), who spent much time with Pitseolak, and extends to more than a dozen grandchildren and great-grandchildren who are engaged in the arts.



Annie Pootoogook, *Three Generations*, 2005, coloured pencil on paper, private collection. Pitseolak's artistic legacy continues through her daughter, Napachie, and her granddaughter Annie, among others.



Goota Ashoona, *The Story of Nuliajuk*, 2009, whale bone, 84 x 110 x 33 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.



STYLE & TECHNIQUE

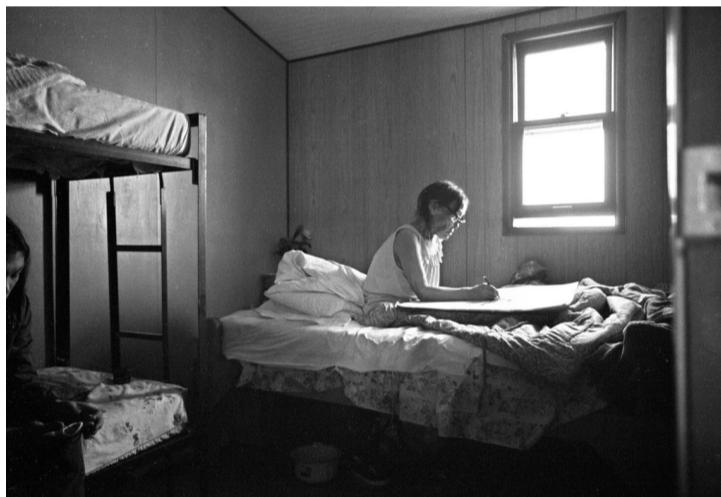
Within the history of Inuit art, Pitseolak's dedication to the development of her personal style and technique through thousands of drawings is remarkable. Beginning with sewn and embroidered work, she progressed quickly to drawing, first with graphite and later experimenting with coloured pencils and felt-tip pens. Many of her drawings were made into prints, and she also tried her hand at printmaking. Pitseolak approached each new medium in a disciplined manner, with an openness to experimentation and a determination to excel.



A SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST

During the course of her career Pitseolak made over 8,000 drawings—by some accounts closer to 9,000, when those that were sold individually are included with those held by the Cape Dorset Drawing Archive. Pitseolak worked out on her own how to represent people, animals, objects, and especially the landscape, one step at a time through multiple drawings, many unfinished yet each progressively closer to achieving the effect she wanted to convey.

Terrence Ryan (1933–2017), who ran the Kinngait Studios for decades, noted that during her most intense period in the 1970s, “Pitseolak, a woman of some seventy-one years, remains the most prolific, drawing almost daily.” Since almost every drawing bought by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative for the print studio has been archived, Pitseolak’s body of work is available for study and offers an exceptional opportunity to gain insight into her creative process.



Pitseolak drawing in bed in her son Kumwartok's house, c. 1975.
Photograph by Tessa Macintosh.



Annie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed*, 2006, coloured pencil on paper, 50.8 x 66 cm, private collection.

For most of her years in Cape Dorset, Pitseolak lived in her son Kumwartok's household and like other Inuit artists created her drawings at home, in the midst of a large extended family. Many relatives, including her grandchildren, remember her sitting on her bed, legs stretched out or bent under her, drawing on large sheets of paper with a selection of coloured pencils and felt-tip pens. Her daughter, Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002), recalled, “She used her own imagination and didn’t like intrusion when she was doing her work because she didn’t want her train of thought to be disturbed.” Yet Pitseolak seemed to welcome quiet visits from her grandchildren, such as Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016), who recalls standing by her bedside as Pitseolak created images.

Only after completing her drawings would Pitseolak take them to the studios. Patricia Ryan, who lived in Cape Dorset with her husband, Terry, described how “almost daily, Pitseolak carries a neatly wrapped package of her drawings to the co-operative.... She prefers to walk the distance of nearly a mile from the home she shares with her son and family.... At the co-operative she replenishes her supply of paper and frequently lingers to admire the drawings of fellow artists.” Pitseolak took these opportunities to see other artists’ imagery at the



studio, but otherwise she worked alone at home, puzzling out artistic problems to her satisfaction as she strove equally for naturalism and expressiveness in her art.

FROM SEWING TO DRAWING

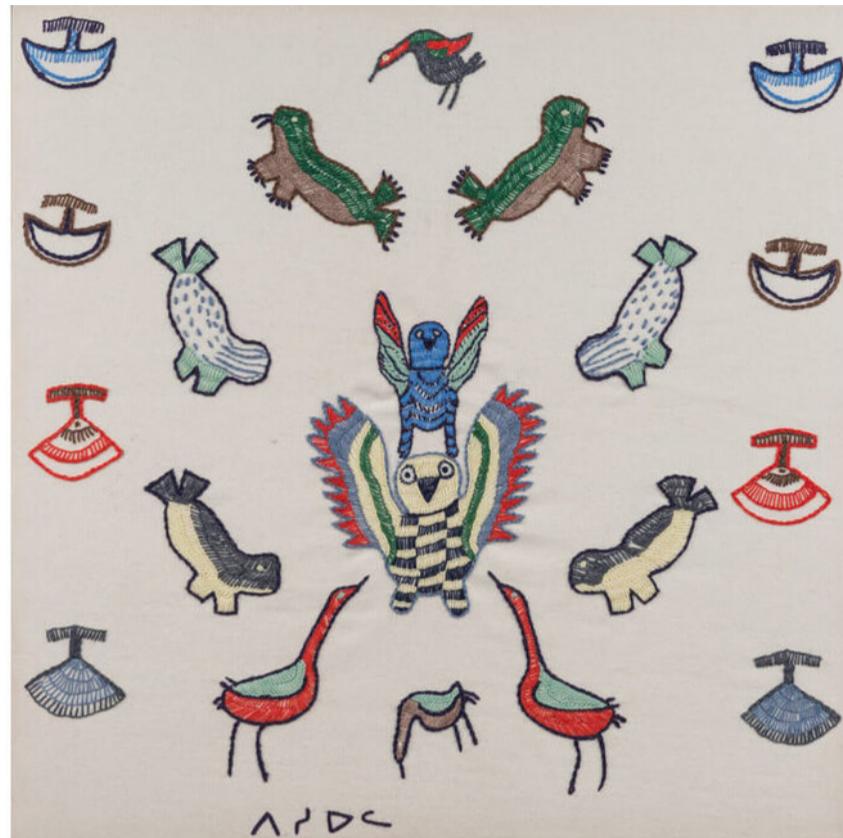
For the first half of her life Pitseolak used her sewing skills to provide her family with essential clothing, footwear, and shelter. After she and her family settled in Cape Dorset, she looked for ways to support herself and her multigenerational household. She saw an opportunity with the arts and crafts program introduced in 1956 by James Houston (1921–2005) and his wife, Alma Houston (1926–1997). Initiated by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, the program was designed as an economic incentive for Inuit who recently settled in the community. James Houston introduced printmaking into the community, establishing a graphic arts workshop, and Alma worked with the local women to create marketable hand-sewn products. Pitseolak joined these women in the production of coats, hats, and mittens in wool and duffel, decorated in appliquéd or embroidery and sold through the Industrial division of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

Although the sewing projects are not well documented, three examples give some insight into Pitseolak's production. The 1964 promotional booklet *Canadian Eskimo Art* features an appliquéd made of dark and light sealskin that pictures a bear hunt, complete with quirky walking birds, and is identified as "by Pitsulak (Woman) Tikkeerak Baffin Island." Citing examples such as this, James Houston claimed that the appliquéd and sewn imagery created by women provided a foundation for the use of the stencil process in the early days of the print studio.

A coat made by Pitseolak for Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau with embroidered figures across the border is more typical of the kind of work she did a decade earlier with Alma Houston. A rare embroidered pictorial work on cloth from the 1960s—created by Pitseolak and presented to George Edwin Bell Blackstock, the Canadian Consul in New Orleans, by Alma Houston during a visit to promote Inuit art—is more closely tied to her drawings on paper.



Sealskin appliquéd by "Pitsulak," c. 1958. As with most of Pitseolak's needlework, the location of this work is unknown.

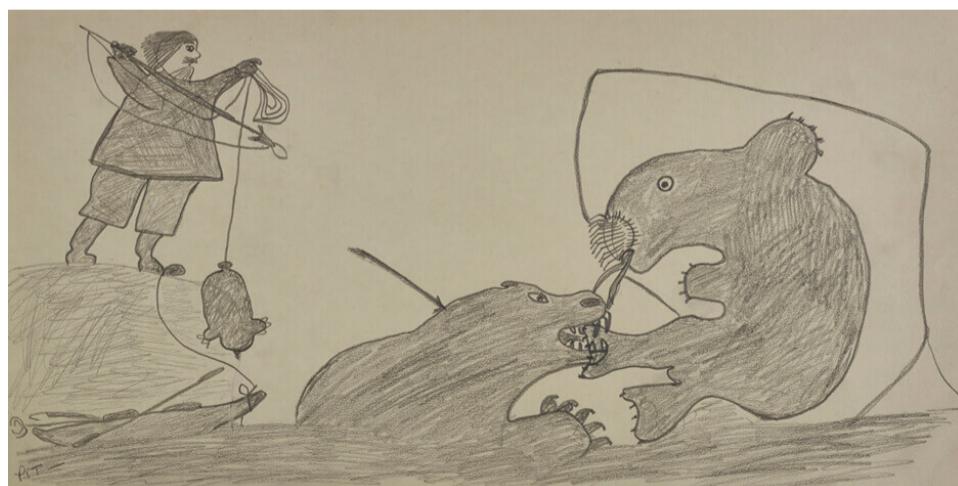


LEFT: Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau wears a fur hat and parka at the 1970 Arctic Winter Games in Yellowknife. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1960, embroidery on stroud, 67 x 67 cm, private collection.

Pitseolak spent two years sewing goods for sale before she recognized another opportunity. By 1959 the Cape Dorset graphics studio was established, and it released its first catalogued print collection. On seeing the work of her cousin Kiakshuk (1886–1966), Pitseolak decided to try drawing, and she purchased paper and drawing materials. Her first efforts were well received by James Houston and later by Terrence Ryan (1933–2017), who succeeded Houston. She quickly became one of the most popular artists creating images for the annual Cape Dorset print collection.

FROM GRAPHITE TO FELT-TIP PENS

Pitseolak did not date her works, but many can be placed by the type of drawing instruments used. Initially, from the late 1950s until 1965, only graphite was available to the Cape Dorset artists. In 1966 coloured pencils were introduced, and the following year felt-tip pens became popular. Felt-tip pens, occasionally in combination with coloured pencils, remained popular until 1975, when the pens were phased out because of the impermanence of their colour.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1962, graphite on paper, 25.5 x 50.7 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario



With only graphite available until 1965, Pitseolak had years in which to master her draftsmanship before moving into colour. In the earliest drawings, such as *Untitled*, c. 1962, she created an outline that she roughly filled in. This initial emphasis on line eventually became her strongest element. She learned to work in positive and negative space, both for compositional structure and for texture, to create variety and visual interest. By 1965 many of Pitseolak's drawings demonstrate a confidence with various drawing techniques.

The transition from graphite to coloured pencils, and learning how these translated onto paper, was a fresh challenge for Pitseolak. In her earliest colour drawings, such as *Untitled*, c. 1965, Pitseolak experiments with the new medium, with somewhat erratic results. She adopts her previous method of outline and filler, while using all colours simultaneously.

Felt-tip pens were Pitseolak's ideal drawing medium. With their rich and vibrant colour, they best expressed the joyfulness that characterizes her work. By this time she had learned to control the combination of colour. She understood that a reduced palette, as in *Untitled*, c. 1966–67, can be stronger than a disarray of many colours. When it was discovered that the pens' colour faded over time, the historian and writer Dorothy Harley Eber remembers how reluctant Pitseolak was to give them up. The switch back to coloured pencils may have frustrated Pitseolak, but she adapted, and the muted colours suit the subdued quality of her later drawings, such as *Untitled (Solitary Figure on the Landscape)*, c. 1980.



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1965, coloured pencil on paper, 50.8 x 65.7 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966–67, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 61.1 x 45.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. These drawings show Pitseolak's early attempts to integrate animal figures into a lush, colourful landscape.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, 1979–80, coloured pencil and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 46.4 x 66.5 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



PRINTMAKING

As can be seen in a comparison of the drawing and the print for *Innuksuk Builders*, 1968, a print tends to strengthen a graphic image; however, without the gestural strokes of the pencil, the energy of Pitseolak's drawing style is largely absent in the print. This translation to print was evident in some artists' work and was recognized early on by the print studio; it led to experiments in print techniques—such as engraving, etching, and lithography—that allowed the artist's hand to be seen. Pitseolak was not active as a printmaker, but her drawing process did extend to working directly on copper plates and, to a lesser degree, lithographic stones.



Pitseolak Ashoona, drawing for print *Innuksuk Builders*, c. 1966-68, wax crayon and coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 50.7 x 65.6 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Innuksuk Builders*, 1968, stonecut on paper, printed by Lukta Qiatsuk, 69.8 x 60.9 cm.

She was one of the first artists to work on an engraving plate when Terrence Ryan (1933-2017) introduced them at the Cape Dorset studios in 1961. Her ability to create interesting scenes in line alone was well suited to engraving, but she found the materials difficult to work with: "I didn't want to keep doing copper because I used to get very tired afterwards.... And I was very afraid of the tool. That very sharp tool used for scratching the copper is like a needle. The tool used to slip and one time I got cut on the finger. It went right through. When I worked on copper I was always expecting to cut myself," she recounted.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Woman with an Ulu*, 1962, engraving on paper. Pitseolak engraved the plate for this print herself.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *A Festive Pursuit*, 1980, from the portfolio *Pitseolak: Childhood Memories*, etching and aquatint on paper, printed by Quyuk Simeonie, 39.4 x 46 cm.



Working on the etching plate, which consisted of drawing with a needle into a soft ground, allowed Pitseolak more ease and flexibility. Engraving and etching were discontinued in 1976 but revived by the studio in 1979. The following year two portfolios of etchings were released, including one devoted solely to her work, entitled *Pitseolak: Childhood Memories*.

Pitseolak participated in some of the experiments in lithography, a printmaking method that was introduced to Inuit artists by the American printmaker Lowell Jones (1935-2004). In an unpublished letter from 1972, the B.C. printmaker Wil Hudson (1929-2014) describes the studio:

In one corner of the shop, opposite from the press, old Pitseolak, a lady of about seventy-some years, croons to herself while she draws on the lithographic stone; she buries her head in her arms; presses a withered cheek against the stone, remains inert for minutes at a time. "Thinking," she says, "is hard as housework. It is hard, hard." She at length raises her head and resumes drawing.

After three years of experimenting, the first lithographs were released in the 1975 Cape Dorset annual print collection, including Pitseolak's *First Bird of Spring*, 1975.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *First Bird of Spring*, 1975, lithograph on paper, 76.4 x 56.4. This is one of the first of Pitseolak's prints to use five different coloured inks.

CREATING MOVEMENT AND SPACE

Pitseolak experimented with her media and with the formal qualities of line, colour, and pictorial space until she mastered these and developed a personal style. This experimentation was motivated by a desire to accurately and expressively depict her favourite subjects. In particular she wanted to convey the movement of all things—people, animals, birds—as well as the familiar environment of her homeland.

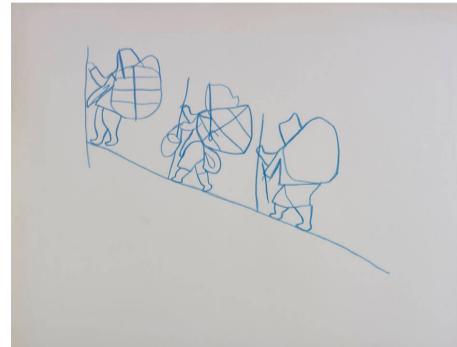


LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Bird Flying Overhead)*, c. 1966-67, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 66.4 x 51.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *The Race*, c. 1973, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 45.9 x 61.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Pitseolak often drew people playing games or engaged in group activities such as dancing or skipping.

Line is the most direct and expressive of the visual elements, and Pitseolak's skill in this regard was undoubtedly her strongest talent. She described her drawing technique: "I draw the whole thing first and then I colour it. I do the whole drawing before I finish it." Only after setting down the fundamental structure with line does Pitseolak build up her image with colour. This explains the predominance of line and also accounts for its spontaneous quality and almost nervous energy.

Pitseolak taught herself to draw figures, both human and animal. Series of her drawings made during the 1960s show how she learned to capture accurate proportions and movement so that her figures appear naturalistic. Even in her later drawings she makes no attempt at modelling or shading—techniques used to create the illusion of three-dimensional form—and yet her figures appear to have bulk and substance. After developing the ability to draw the figure, Pitseolak focused on how to depict the figure in motion, as in *Untitled*, c. 1965. Her fascination with depicting movement across the landscape can be related to her own nomadic lifestyle until the late 1950s.

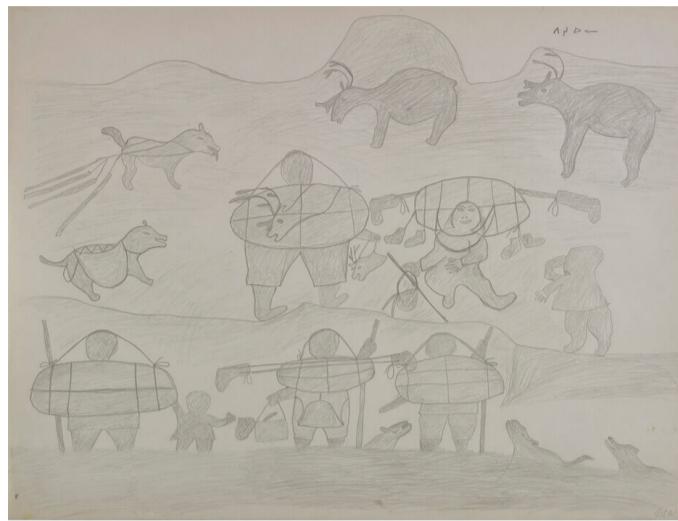
Drawing on her memories of living on the land, Pitseolak made many images of the landscape, continuously refining her depiction of visual space. From her years of designing and sewing textiles, she adapted two devices found in Inuit clothing design—mirroring a motif, and breaking down the visual surface into registers. These devices proved especially useful in developing clear spatial divisions with different narratives and activities occurring in each of them. Her adoption of ground lines gave her landscapes foregrounds, middle grounds, and backgrounds. She associated space with distance and was able to convey the movement of figures through the land, as shown in *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1965, coloured pencil on paper, 50.7 x 65.8 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This drawing, perhaps unfinished, gives insight into Pitseolak's technique, as it shows the initial outline with no additional colour filled in.

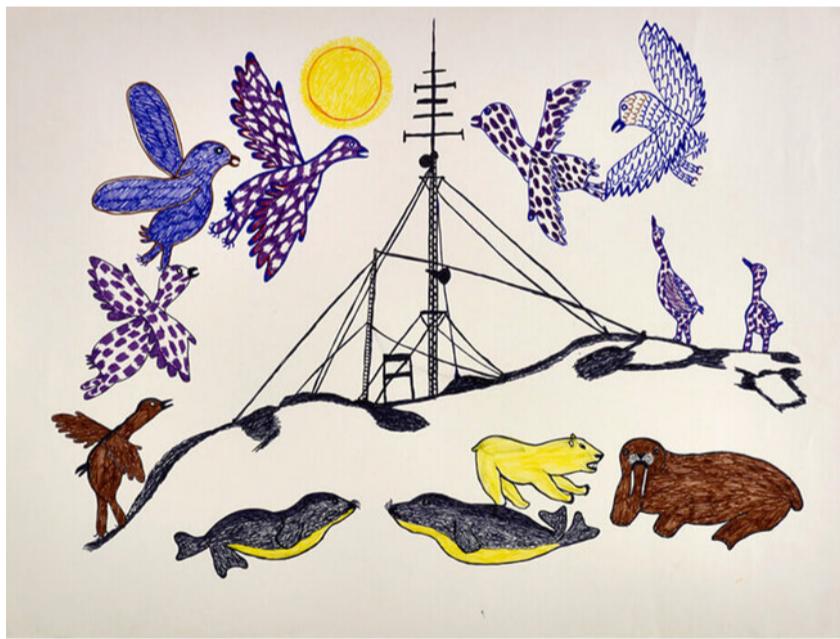


Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1959-65, graphite on paper, 45.8 x 60.9 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

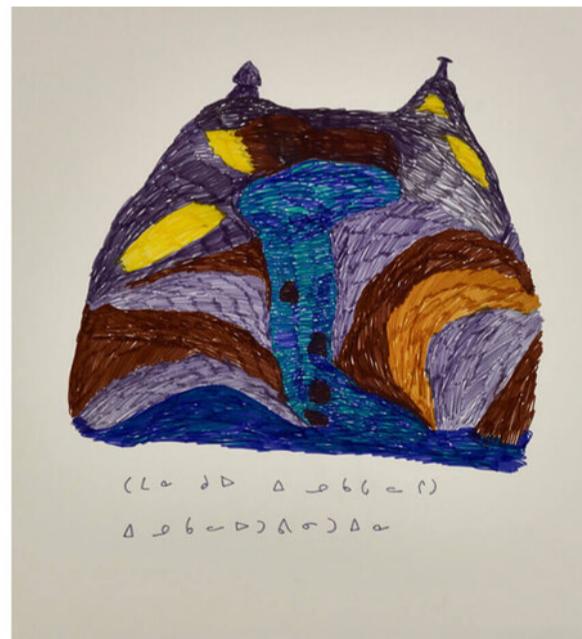


Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1959-65, graphite on paper, 46 x 61.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. This drawing shows a group of people moving across the hilly landscape.

Pitseolak's drawings of the land are an expression of her emotional ties and experiences. In later drawings, such as *Untitled (Solitary Figure on the Landscape)*, c. 1980, figures become progressively smaller and are folded within the landscape. This can be seen as a refinement in her style but also suggests nostalgia for an immediate relation to the land. These later works may be Pitseolak's way of revisiting the places of her younger years as well as an expression of regret for the passing of the nomadic way of life.



LEFT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966-76, coloured pencil, 45.9 x 61.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Pitseolak includes a microwave tower in this unusual landscape drawing, which relates to a CN Telecommunications commission completed by Pitseolak in the mid-1970s. RIGHT: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*, c. 1966-76, coloured felt-tip pen on paper, 46.7 x 42.2 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



WHERE TO SEE



The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is the caretaker of the Cape Dorset Drawing Archive, which includes more than eight thousand original drawings by Pitseolak Ashoona. Prints by Pitseolak can be found in many museums and galleries across Canada and internationally. Although the drawings listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.



ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Tattooed Woman, 1960**
Graphite on paper
41.9 x 53.4 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Summer Camping,
c. 1960-65**
Graphite on paper
48.5 x 64 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Women Gutting Fish,
c. 1960-65**
Graphite on paper
20.8 x 25.2 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Winter Camping,
c. 1966-76**
Coloured felt-tip pen
and coloured pencil on
paper
50.8 x 65.7 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona, *In
summer there were
always very big
mosquitoes*, 1970**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
68.6 x 53.5 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Fantastic Animals,
c. 1970**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.1 x 50.7 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Moving Camp, c. 1971**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
51.8 x 66.3 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Summer Voyage, 1971**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
68.6 x 53.2 cm



MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

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Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1959-61**
Graphite on paper
21.6 x 27.8 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1959-65**
Graphite on paper
46 x 61.2 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1959-65**
Graphite on paper
45.8 x 60.9 cm



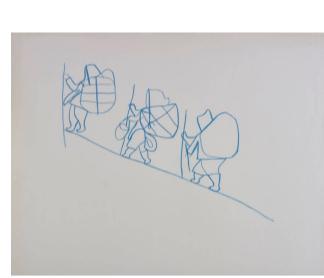
Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1959-65**
Graphite on paper
47.9 x 60.7 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1962**
Graphite on paper
25.5 x 50.7 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1962-64**
Blue felt-tip pen on
paper
35.1 x 41.8 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
***Untitled*, c. 1965**
Coloured pencil on
paper
50.7 x 65.8 cm

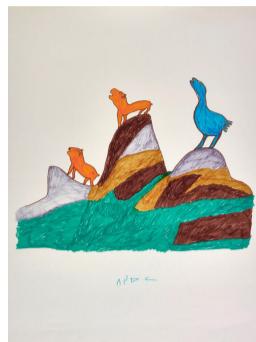


Pitseolak
Ashoona, *Untitled*,
c. 1965
Coloured pencil on
paper
50.8 x 65.7 cm



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-67
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
61.1 x 45.8 cm



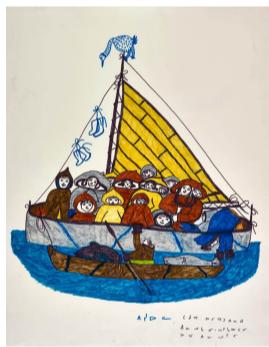
Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Untitled (Bird Flying
Overhead)*, c. 1966-67
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.4 x 51.2 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Untitled (Birds Flying
Overhead)*, c. 1966-67
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
65.6 x 50.5 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print
Innuksuk Builders,
c. 1966-68
Wax crayon and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
65.6 x 50.7 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print
*Eskimos on Sealskin
Boat*, c. 1966-72
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.4 x 51.4 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-76
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
35.5 x 21.6 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Untitled (Bird and
Woman)*, c. 1966-76
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
50.8 x 65.8 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Untitled (Woman
Attacked by Birds)*,
c. 1966-76
Wax crayon and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
38.6 x 46.2 cm



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

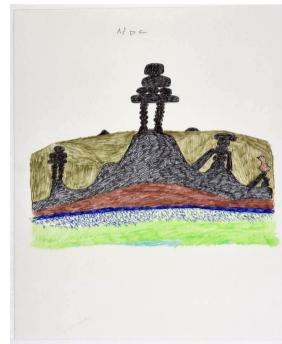
Life & Work by Christine Lalonde



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-76
Wax crayon and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
50.8 x 65.8 cm



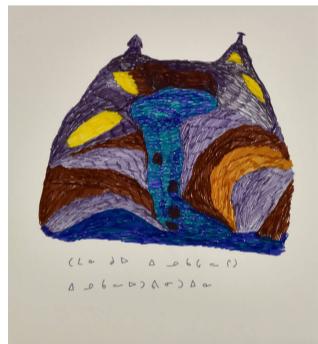
Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-76
Coloured pencil on
paper
45.9 x 61.2 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-76
Coloured pencil and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
43.9 x 36 cm



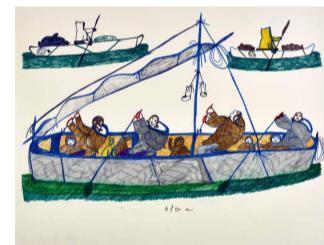
Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print *The
River at Netsilik*,
c. 1966-76
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.4 x 51 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1966-76
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
46.7 x 42.2 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print
Summer Camp Scene,
c. 1966-76
Wax crayon and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
45.7 x 61.2 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print
Journey to Toodja,
c. 1973
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
50.7 x 66.3 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, 1976
Coloured pencil and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
51.4 x 66.7 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
drawing for print
Memories of Childbirth,
1976
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
24.1 x 35.6 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1979-80
Coloured pencil and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
51.1 x 66.1 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
Untitled, c. 1979-80
Coloured pencil and
coloured felt-tip pen on
paper
46.4 x 66.5 cm



Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Untitled (Solitary
Figure on the
Landscape)*, c. 1980
Coloured pencil on
paper
51.4 x 66.5 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled*,
1981**

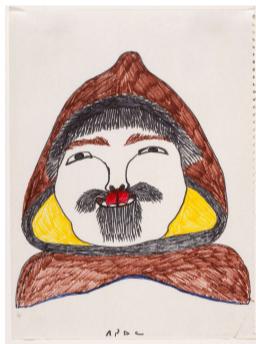
Coloured pencil and coloured
felt-tip pen on paper
51.2 x 66.8 cm

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**Pitseolak Ashoona, *The
Critic*, c. 1963**
Graphite on paper
47.6 x 61.1 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Portrait of Ashoona,
c. 1970**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
27.6 x 20.5 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Travelling on Foot,
c. 1970-76**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.5 x 50.7 cm

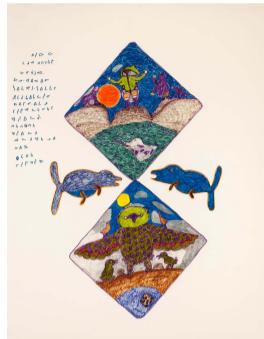


**Pitseolak Ashoona, *The
Race*, c. 1973**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
45.9 x 61.1 cm



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Legend of the Woman
Who Turned into a
Narwhal*, c. 1974**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66 x 50.7 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
Summer Camp Scene,
c. 1974**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
50.6 x 65.4 cm



**Pitseolak Ashoona,
*Eyes of a Happy
Woman*, c. 1974**
Coloured felt-tip pen
on paper
66.2 x 51 cm



NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. In his oral biography, Peter Pitseolak recounts that Ottochie made the crossing from Nunavik to Qikiqtaaluk around 1904 and a second time in 1908 when, at Tuja, Peter's family met Ottochie, Timungiak, and their children, including Pitseolak, who he notes had not yet had a birthday. Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 49-50, 70-71.
2. Pitseolak Ashoona, interviewed by Marion E. Jackson, Cape Dorset, February 15, 1979, unpublished transcript, Aboriginal Art Centre at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.
3. Author's personal communication with Dorothy Harley Eber, Montreal, March 10, 1994.
4. Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 70-71.
5. Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 74.
6. Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among Canadian Inuit* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 88-89.
7. Dorothy Harley Eber, "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1907-1983)," in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 119.
8. Dorothy Harley Eber, "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1907-1983)," in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 117.
9. Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 108.
10. Quoted in Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 15.
11. Quoted in Dorothy Harley Eber, "Eskimo Tales," *Natural History* 86, no. 8 (October 1977): 126-29.
12. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 88. The date is given as 1922 in an information sheet in the artist's file at the Aboriginal Art



Centre, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the source Dorothy Harley Eber. Reverend Archibald Fleming, later Bishop of the Arctic, was known as Inutauquq, meaning "new person"; however, he was not posted in the North in 1922-23. The Anglican minister was possibly Reverend Lackie. Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 113.

13. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 32. The main fall and summer camps were identified by Kiugak Ashoona in interviews with Darlene Coward Wight for *Kiugak Ashoona: Stories and Imaginings from Cape Dorset* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2010). Additional camp names and locations were identified on a map by Kiugak Ashoona during videotaped interviews with Christine Lalonde, Jimmy Manning, and Leevee Ashoona in Cape Dorset, June and September 2014.

14. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 28, 32.

15. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 31.

16. Quoted in Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 16.

17. Quoted in Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 16.

18. Quoted in Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 16.

19. Kiugak Ashoona, videotaped interview with Christine Lalonde and Leevee Ashoona, Cape Dorset, September 2014.

20. Ashoona's death date is uncertain, though Napachie Pootoogook believed she was around six or seven years old, and Kiugak Ashoona has said he was around eleven, placing Ashoona's death in c. 1945. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 64.

21. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 66.

22. Quoted in unedited, unpublished transcript (Aboriginal Art Centre at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa) for article by Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982).

23. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 66.



24. Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 14.
25. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 88.
26. For more on the early arts and crafts program and clothing production, see Christine Lalonde, "Colonialism Changes Everything," in *Inuit Modern*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario; Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 27-31.
27. Quoted in Marion E. Jackson, "The Ashoonas of Cape Dorset: In Touch with Tradition," *North/Nord* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 15.
28. This moment of success was tempered by the recent death of her son Ottochie, which also made the newspaper headlines. During interviews Pitseolak said, "My happiness is only on the outside today.... My son Ottochie was in hospital here then but he has died and I never saw his body." Joseph MacSween, "City Fails to Disturb Calm of Arctic Artist," *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1977. The location of Ottochie's grave was not known at the time, but Pitseolak did visit his grave on a later trip with her granddaughter Shuvinai Ashoona. Personal communication with Mary Bergen Ashoona, November 11, 2014.
29. Two additional films about Pitseolak Ashoona were made by International Cinemedia Centre in 1975: *The Way We Live Today* and *Spirits and Monsters*.

KEY WORKS: TATTOOED WOMAN

1. During most of Pitseolak's life, seal and caribou fur would have been the predominant materials used for clothing. From the mid-1940s an increasing range of fabrics became available, leading to more creativity while respect for the older styles was maintained.
2. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 20.
3. Dorothy Harley Eber, "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1907-1983)," in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 104.

KEY WORKS: THE CRITIC

1. This perspective is documented by Marion E. Jackson in "Baker Lake Inuit Drawings: A Study in the Evolution of Artistic Self-Consciousness" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1985).
2. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 78.

KEY WORKS: UNTITLED (BIRDS FLYING OVERHEAD)

1. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd



ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 13. The pitseolak is also known as the black guillemot.

2. Pitseolak, quoted by Dorothy Harley Eber, "Eskimo Tales," *Natural History* 86, no. 8 (October 1977): 128

KEY WORKS: INNUKSHUK BUILDERS

1. Also spelled innukshuk; the standard spelling is inukshuk
2. Pitseolak identified this image of her father to Dorothy Harley Eber during interviews for the film *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life* (National Film Board of Canada, 1972). Telephone interview with Dorothy Eber, January 5, 1995.
3. Dorothy Harley Eber, "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1907-1983)," in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 104. See also Dorothy Harley Eber, "Glimpses of Seekooseelak History," in *Cape Dorset* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1980), 23.
4. Based on information from Pouta (Pauta Saila), in *Uqalurait, An Oral History of Nunavut*, ed. John Bennett and Susan Rowley (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2004), 257-58.

KEY WORKS: PORTRAIT OF ASHOONA

1. Namoonie Ashoona, from interviews conducted in April 2002, quoted in Dorothy Harley Eber, "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1907-1983)," in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 112.

KEY WORKS: LEGEND OF THE WOMAN WHO TURNED INTO A NARWHAL

1. A similar version of the story is illustrated in a 1976 print, *The Woman Who Became a Narwhal*, by Peter Morgan, from Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik (Arctic Quebec), also with an explanation in syllabics: "This is the story of a woman whose husband used her as a dog. He made her pull her komatik (sled) and he whipped her when she had trouble pulling the heavy load. During one such whipping, she ran away. She dove into the water and became a narwhal. The husband, fearful of losing her, ran after her calling, 'I love you and cannot lose you. Come back!' Her only answer was 'You whipped me.'" Reproduced in Louis Gagnon, "Gift of the Caribou: Peter Morgan," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 6.

2. The syllabic inscription was translated by the Indian and Inuit Art Centre (now the Aboriginal Art Centre), at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and again by July Papatsie on July 24, 1996. National Gallery of Canada, curatorial file for *Legend of the Woman Who Turned into a Narwhal*.

KEY WORKS: DRAWING FOR PRINT MEMORIES OF CHILDBIRTH

1. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 31.
2. Robin McGrath, "Circumventing the Taboos: Inuit Women's



Autobiographies," unpublished paper presented at the 7th Inuit Studies Conference, Fairbanks, Alaska, 1990.

3. Leslie Boyd Ryan elaborates on this in relation to Napachie Pootoogook's artwork in "Mannaruluujujuq (Not So Long Ago): The Memories of Napachie Pootoogook," in *Napachie Pootoogook* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2004), 13.

4. Another notable artist who treated this rare subject matter was Ennutsiaq (1896-1967), who became famous for his unusual sculptures of birthing scenes.

5. See the accompanying exhibition catalogue: Susan J. Gustavison, *Arctic Expressions: Inuit Art and the Canadian Eskimo Art Council, 1961-1989* (Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1994).

KEY WORKS: THE SHAMAN'S WIFE

1. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 20.

2. Kiugak Ashoona, interview with Darlene Wight and Goota Ashoona as interpreter, Yellowknife, February 18-22, 2008.

KEY WORKS: UNTITLED (SOLITARY FIGURE ON THE LANDSCAPE)

1. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 90, 92.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Suzanne Evaloardjuk, Peter Irniq, Uriash Puqiqnak, and David Serkoak, foreword to *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*, ed. John R. Bennett and Susan Rowley (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), xxi. Since the creation of Nunavut in 1999, the territorial government has sought to follow the guiding principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit at the core of their institutional structure.

2. Kiugak Ashoona, quoted in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 124.

3. Jean Blodgett, *Grasp Tight the Old Ways: Selections from the Klamer Family Collection of Inuit Art* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 128.

4. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 76.

5. Kay Kritzwiser, "Eskimo Art Conveys Innocence," *Globe & Mail* (Toronto), December 1, 1969.

6. Traditional attitudes often affected the choice of medium, however. In Cape Dorset, for Pitseolak and women of her generation, drawings and textiles were the preferred media, whereas men dominate in sculpture, albeit with many notable exceptions.



7. Sorosilutu Ashoona, artist page, in *Dorset 79: The Twentieth Annual Cape Dorset Graphics Collection* (Toronto: M.F. Feheley, 1979), 69.

8. James Houston, introduction to *Dorset 79: Cape Dorset Annual Graphics Collection* (Toronto: M.F. Feheley, 1979).

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. It was first estimated that Pitseolak created approximately 6,000 drawings, based on documentation at the Aboriginal Art Centre (Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development). After thorough cataloguing of the Cape Dorset Archive of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, housed at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the number has been revised to 8,702 drawings, which does not include those in private or public collections. Jean Blodgett, *Three Women, Three Generations: Drawings by Pitseolak Ashoona, Napachie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona* (Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1999), 30.

2. Terrence Ryan, introduction to *Dorset 75: Cape Dorset Annual Graphics Collection* (Toronto: M.F. Feheley Publishers, 1975), 10.

3. Napachie Pootoogook, "Memories of Pitseolak Ashoona," *Inuit Women Artists: Voices from Cape Dorset*, ed. Odette Leroux, Marion E. Jackson, and Minnie Aodla Freeman (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization; Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre), 45.

4. Patricia Ryan, "Pitseolak," in *Dorset 80: Cape Dorset Annual Graphics Collection* (Toronto: M.F. Feheley Publishers, 1980), 10.

5. James A. Houston, *Canadian Eskimo Art* (Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1964), 24. Tikkeerak is likely meant to be Tikivak, one of the outlying camps around Cape Dorset.

6. Author communication with Marie Routledge, August 25, 2014.

7. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 70.

8. Based on information supplied by Terrence Ryan for the chronology developed by Marie Routledge and Marion E. Jackson in *Pudlo: Thirty Years of Drawing* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), 41-52.

9. Author communication with Dorothy Harley Eber, March 10, 1994. In the 1970s it was discovered that the ink of felt-tip pens faded, and when drawings were stacked, the ink bled through the paper to the next sheet.

10. Pitseolak Ashoona in *Pictures Out of My Life*, ed. Dorothy Harley Eber, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 102.

11. Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History* (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland, 1999), 196.



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde

12. Wil Hudson correspondence, September 24, 1972, Brendan Shields Collection, Vancouver.

13. Pitseolak Ashoona, interviewed by Marion E. Jackson, Cape Dorset, May 17, 1979 (unpublished transcript).



GLOSSARY

Ashoona, Goota (Kinngait, b. 1967)

A third-generation artist from Cape Dorset, Goota Ashoona is a carver of traditional Inuit whalebone and stone sculptures. In 2008 the family studio held the exhibition *The Gift from Haida Gwaii*, which included a two-metre-high piece collaboratively carved from a single whale's rib.

Ashoona, Kiugak (Kinngait, 1933–2014)

A master carver of traditional Inuit sculpture, Kiugak Ashoona received the Order of Canada in 2000 and is among the most significant figures in contemporary northern art. A second-generation Inuit artist, he was one of Pitseolak Ashoona's sons. A retrospective exhibition of his decades-long career was held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 2010.

Ashoona, Mayoreak (Ashoona, Mayureak) (Saturituk/Kinngait, b. 1946)

A graphic artist and master carver whose mother was the pioneering graphic artist Sheouak Parr. After the death of her husband, the carver Qaqaq Ashoona, Mayoreak Ashoona moved from their camp on southern Baffin Island to Cape Dorset. Her work has been exhibited in Germany and Japan, as well as across Canada.

Ashoona, Qaqaq (Ikirasak/Kinngait, 1928–1996)

A hunter and trapper born in Ikirasak (formerly Ikerrasak), a camp on southern Baffin Island, who began carving in his mid-twenties. Qaqaq Ashoona carved his human and animal figures using only hand tools and notably worked in a local white marble. He was married to the artist Mayoreak Ashoona and was one of Pitseolak Ashoona's sons.

Ashoona, Shuvinal (Kinngait, b. 1961)

A third-generation artist from Cape Dorset, Shuvinal Ashoona creates unconventional and imaginative graphic works that are widely collected and exhibited. Her work ranges from intensely coloured and intricate coloured pencil drawings to boldly graphic stonecuts and monochromatic ink drawings of simple, isolated forms. (See *Shuvinal Ashoona: Life & Work* by Nancy G. Campbell.)

Ashoona, Sorosilutu (Kinngait, b. 1941)

A prominent Cape Dorset artist who was encouraged as a young woman by her mother-in-law, Pitseolak Ashoona. Early on, Sorosilutu Ashoona was drawn to the colours that could be achieved through printmaking techniques. Her lithographs, stonecuts, and stencils often refer to Inuit stories familiar from her youth.

engraving

The name applied to both a type of print and the process used in its production. Engravings are made by cutting into a metal or plastic plate with specialized tools and then inking the incised lines. The ink is transferred to paper under the immense pressure of a printing press.



etching

A printmaking technique that follows the same principles as engraving but uses acid instead of a burin to cut through the plate. A copper plate is coated with a waxy acid resist; the artist draws an image into the wax with a needle. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath, incising the lines and leaving the rest of the plate untouched.

Graham, K.M. (Canadian, 1913–2008)

A widely collected landscape artist, K.M. (Kathleen Margaret) Graham worked in an abstract expressionist style. Attracted to the light and colours of the North, Graham made many painting trips to the Arctic beginning in 1971. She also produced drawings, prints, and graphic designs for liturgical vestments and book and magazine covers.

Hanson, Ann Meekitjuk (Qakutut/Iqaluit, b. 1946)

Born into a traditional Inuit life, Ann Meekitjuk Hanson spoke only Inuktitut for the first eleven years of her life. She has been a civil servant, journalist and broadcaster, with an impressive body of work within the CBC, the National Film Board, and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation. She served as Commissioner of Nunavut (2005–10).

Houston, Alma (1926–1997)

An important figure in Canadian art for her role in bringing international attention to Inuit art. From 1951 to 1962 she lived and worked in the Arctic with her husband, James Houston, who introduced printmaking to the Inuit. In 1981 she and her son John, born on Baffin Island, founded the Houston North Gallery in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, which continues to promote Inuit art and culture.

Houston, James (Canadian, 1921–2005)

An artist, writer, filmmaker, and civil administrator who with his wife, Alma Houston, was instrumental in the popularization of Inuit art. After studying art in Toronto and Paris, Houston spent fourteen years in the Canadian Arctic. In 1949, working with the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, he organized the first exhibition of Inuit art in southern Canada, held in Montreal.

Hudson, Wil (Canadian, 1929–2014)

Born in Wisconsin, Wil Hudson settled in British Columbia, where he was recognized for fine letterpress printing. He was one of a number of artists who introduced printmaking techniques to the Cape Dorset print studio in the early 1970s.

Jones, Lowell (American, 1935–2004)

Trained at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, Jones taught drawing, lithography, and sculpture at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. He took a leave of absence to teach lithography to Inuit artists in Cape Dorset. In 1978 he moved to Chico, California, and devoted himself to his art, focusing on kinetic sculpture.



Kiakshuk (Ungava Peninsula/Kinngait, 1886–1966)

A gifted storyteller who took up drawing and printmaking in the last decade of his life. Like his stories, Kiakshuk's artworks recount tales of the natural and spirit worlds, hunting, and domestic life. In addition to his drawings, engravings, and stencil and stonewall prints he also occasionally produced carvings.

lithograph

A type of print invented in 1798 in Germany by Alois Senefelder. Like other planographic methods of image reproduction, lithography relies on the fact that grease and water do not mix. Placed in a press, the moistened and inked lithographic stone will print only those areas previously designed with greasy lithographic ink.

Oonark, Jessie (Qamani'tuaq, 1906–1985)

A major figure in twentieth-century Canadian art, Jessie Oonark was raised in traditional semi-nomadic Inuit camps near the Back River and later settled in Baker Lake in what is now Nunavut. Her boldly graphic textiles and drawings depicting the natural and spirit worlds are included in major public collections across Canada and internationally.

Pootoogook, Annie (Kinngait, 1969–2016)

One of Canada's most prominent Inuit artists, whose non-traditional and very personal drawings and prints convey her experience of present-day life in Cape Dorset. Her extraordinarily artistic family includes her parents, Eegyvadluq and Napachie Pootoogook, and her grandmother Pitseolak Ashoona. In 2006 Annie Pootoogook won the prestigious Sobey Art Award and in 2007 was exhibited in Germany at Documenta 12.

Pootoogook, Napachie (Kinngait, 1938–2002)

Napachie Pootoogook was born in Sako, a camp on the southwest coast of Baffin Island, and took up drawing in the late 1950s alongside her mother, Pitseolak Ashoona. While her earliest prints and drawings largely depict the Inuit spirit world, from the 1970s she concentrated on more earth-bound subjects, including historical events and traditional life and customs.

Qiatsuk, Lukta (Kinngait, 1928–2004)

A sculptor, graphic artist, and printmaker, Lukta Qiatsuk began making art in Cape Dorset in 1957–58. He was the master printmaker for more than two hundred prints for the Cape Dorset annual print collection. His sculpture includes both human and wildlife subjects, with a strong focus on birds, particularly owls.

Ryan, Terrence (Canadian, 1933–2017)

A Toronto artist who settled in Cape Dorset in 1960, where for nearly fifty years he managed and then directed what is now Kinngait Studios, the most prosperous printmaking centre in Canadian history. Ryan received the Order of Canada in 1983 and a Governor General's Award in 2010 for his support of the visual arts in northern Canada.



Soper, J. Dewey (Canadian, 1893–1982)

A naturalist and explorer dispatched on several research missions to Baffin Island by the Geological Survey of Canada during the 1920s. In 1926 he journeyed from his headquarters at Pangnirtung to Cape Dorset, returning with a number of unattributed figurative ivory carvings that are now in the collection of the Canadian Museum of History, in Gatineau, Quebec.

stonecut

A variation on the woodcut, which uses stone rather than a block of wood to create a relief print. Stonecut printmaking originated with Inuit artists and remains largely unique to Canada's north.

Wyse, Alexander (British/Canadian, b. 1938)

A prolific printmaker, painter, and multimedia artist whose work reflects an abiding interest in the natural world. Wyse immigrated to Canada in 1961 and settled in Cape Dorset, where he taught engraving. He moved to Ontario in 1964 and currently lives in Ottawa.

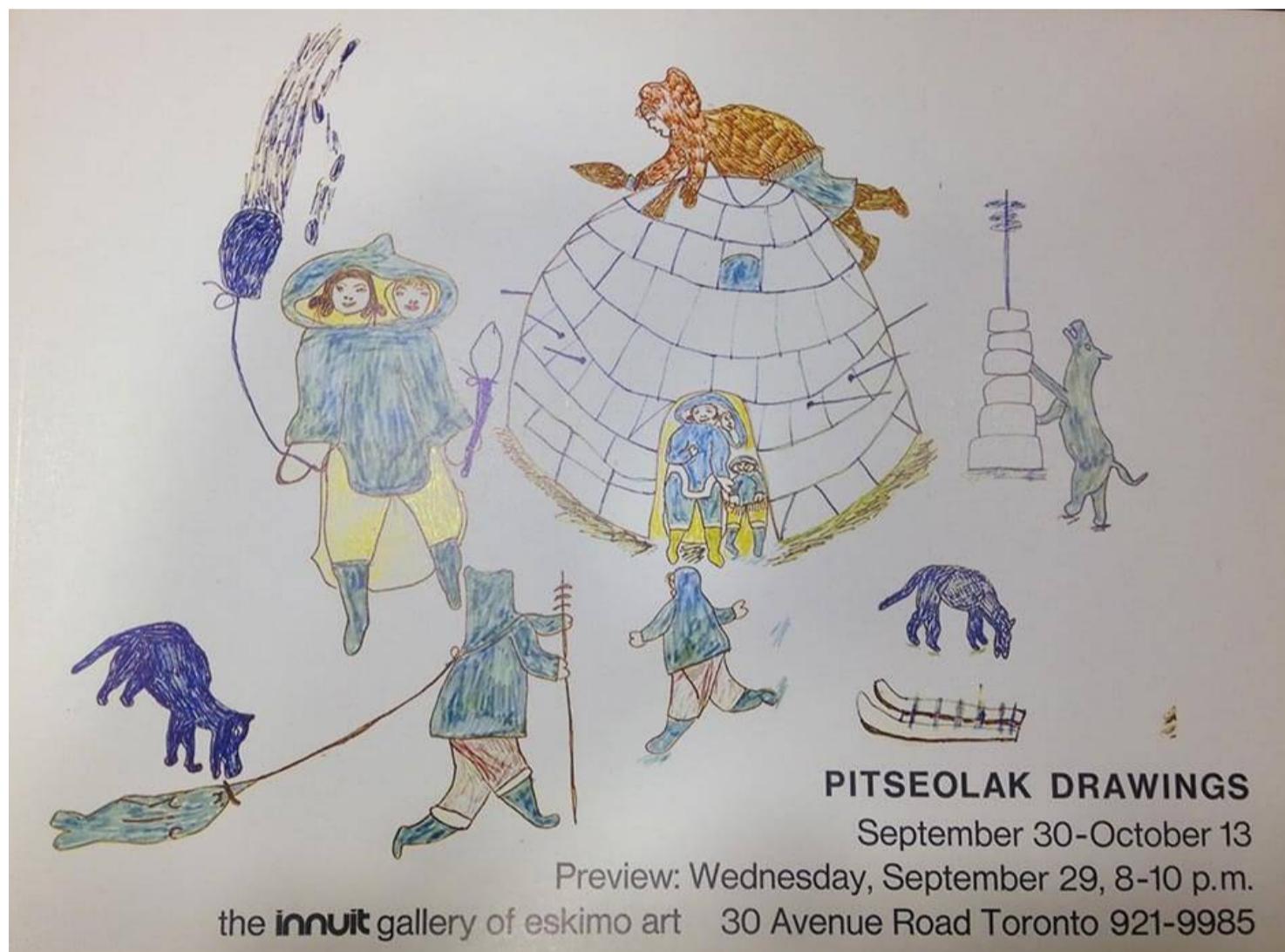


Although the study of Inuit art was in its infancy during her lifetime, there are significant resources on Pitseolak Ashoona, particularly in the form of published oral interviews and records of her exhibition history.



KEY EXHIBITIONS

Selected here are exhibitions that presented Pitseolak's work in a thought-provoking context or reached new or broad audiences outside of the common parameters of Inuit art. Typical for an Inuit artist, her works have been exhibited extensively, continuing into the decades since her death in 1983, while little has been published about her.



Postcard for the 1971 exhibition of Pitseolak's drawings at the Innuit Gallery in Toronto.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1971** Pitseolak: Print Retrospective 1962-1970, Canadian Handicrafts Guild, Montreal.

September-October 1971, *Pitseolak Drawings*, Innuit Gallery of Eskimo Art, Toronto.

- 1975** February 1975, *Drawings by Pitseolak*, Innuit Gallery of Eskimo Art, Toronto.

- 1975-77** Pitseolak, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development with Dorset Fine Arts. International tour. Catalogue.

- 1982** November 1982, *Pitseolak: Original Drawings*, Houston North Gallery, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia; with the Canadian Book Information Centre, Halifax.

SOURCES & RESOURCES

1975

May 1975, *Original Drawings by Nine Cape Dorset Women*, Gallery of Fine Canadian Crafts, Kingston, Ontario.

1975–78

We Lived by Animals, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, with the Department of External Affairs. International tour.

1976

October–November 1976, *Selections from the Toronto-Dominion Collection of Inuit Eskimo Art*, National Arts Centre, Ottawa.

1977–82

January 1977–June 1982, *The Inuit Print*, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, with the National Museum of Man, Ottawa. Tour.

1978

March–June 1978, *The Coming and Going of the Shaman: Eskimo Shamanism and Art*, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Catalogue.



1979–80 July 1979–May 1980, *Inuit Art in the 1970s*, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario. Tour.

1979–81 July 1979–October 1981, *Images of the Inuit: From the Simon Fraser Collection*, Simon Fraser Gallery, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia. Tour; catalogue.

1980 April–May 1980, *The Dorset Group of Four: Drawings and Prints by Kenojuak, Lucy, Parr and Pitseolak*, Canadiana Galleries, Edmonton.

July–August 1980, *Inuit Graphics from the Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

August–September 1980, *Members of the R.C.A.*, Canadian National Exhibition Association, Toronto.

August–October 1980, *The Inuit Amautik: I Like My Hood to Be Full*, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

September–October 1980, *The Inuit Sea Goddess*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Tour.

1981 July–August 1981, *Eskimo Games: Graphics and Sculpture*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome. Catalogue.

September–October 1981, *The Jacqui and Morris Shumiatcher Collection of Inuit Art*, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina.

1981–83 October 1981–February 1983, *The Murray and Marguerite Vaughan Inuit Print Collection*, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton. Tour.

1982 April 1982, *Cape Dorset Drawings*, Godard Editions, Calgary.

1983 October–November 1983, *The Cape Dorset Print*, organized by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for Rideau Hall, Ottawa.

October–December 1983, *Inuit Masterworks: Selections from the Collection of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

1983–85 May 1983–April 1985, *Grasp Tight the Old Ways: Selections from the Klamer Collection of Inuit Art*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Tour; catalogue.

November 1983–March 1985, *Contemporary Indian and Inuit Art of Canada*, organized by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for the General Assembly Building, United Nations, New York. Tour.



1984 June-August 1984, *Cape Dorset Prints: Twenty-Five Years*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

1984–85 November 1984–February 1985, *Stones, Bones, Cloth, and Paper: Inuit Art in Edmonton Collections*, Edmonton Art Gallery.

1984–86 February 1984–June 1986, *Arctic Vision: Art of the Canadian Inuit*, organized by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Canadian Arctic Producers. Tour.

1986 May–September 1986, *From Drawing to Print: Perceptions and Process in Cape Dorset Art*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

July–September 1986, *Contemporary Inuit Art*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

1987 January–February 1987, *The Matriarchs: Jessie Oonark, Helen Kalvak, Pitseolak Ashoona*, Snow Goose Associates, Seattle.

1987–88 November 1987–January 1988, *Inuitkonst från Kanada – skulptör och grafik*, Millesgården, Lidingö, Sweden. Catalogue.

December 1987–February 1988, *Contemporary Inuit Drawings*, Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario. Catalogue.

1988 April 1988, *Inuit Images in Transition*, Augusta Savage Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Catalogue.

November–December 1988, *Inuit Women and Their Art: Graphics and Wallhangings*, Gallery 210, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

1988–91 December 1988–October 1991, *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art in Canada*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec. International tour.

1989 January–April 1989, *Cape Dorset Printmaking 1959–1989*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

June–July 1989, *Drawings of the 1960s from Cape Dorset*, Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto, with Gimpel Fils, London, England.

June–July 1989, *A New Day Dawning: Early Cape Dorset Prints*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Catalogue.

1990 January–September 1990, *Arctic Mirror*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec.

1990–91 November 1990–February 1991, *Espaces Inuit*, Maison Hamel-Bruneau, Ste-Foy, Quebec.



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- 1991** January 1991, *Sojourns to Nunavut: Contemporary Inuit Art from Canada*, Bunkamura Art Gallery, Tokyo, presented by University of British Columbia, Museum of Anthropology; and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.
-
- 1991–92** December 1991–March 1992, *In Cape Dorset We Do It This Way: Three Decades of Inuit Printmaking*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Catalogue.
-
- 1992** 1992, *Women of the North: An Exhibition of Inuit Women of the Canadian Arctic*, Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver.
- February–September 1992, *Inuit Art: Drawings and Recent Sculpture*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
- November–December 1992, *Original Drawings from Cape Dorset by Lucy, Pitseolak, Kingmeata*, Albers Gallery, San Francisco.
- February–September 1992, *Inuit Art: Drawings and Recent Sculpture*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
-
- 1993** November–December 1993, *Women Who Draw: 30 Years of Graphic Art from the Canadian Arctic*, Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto.
-
- 1994** July 1994, *Arctic Spirit: 35 Years of Canadian Inuit Art*, Frye Art Museum, Seattle.
- September–October 1994, *Kunst van de Inuit Eskimo's*, Gemeentelijk Kunstcentrum, Huis Hellemans, Edegem, Belgium.
- September–October 1994, *Kunst aus der Arktis*, Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.
-
- 1994–95** May 1994–July 1995, *Cape Dorset Revisited*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Catalogue.
- October 1994–September 1995, *Isumavut: The Artistic Expression of Nine Cape Dorset Women*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec. International tour.
-
- 1995** March–July 1995, *Immaginario Inuit Arte e cultura degli esquimesi canadesi*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Verona, Italy. Catalogue.
-
- 1995–96** December 1995–March 1996, *Imaak Takujavut: The Way We See It: Paintings from Cape Dorset*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Catalogue.



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde

1999 May-October 1999, *Three Women, Three Generations: Drawings by Pitseolak Ashoona, Napatchie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

2004–05 October 2004-May 2005, *The Power of Dreams*, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

2006 *Arctic Spirit: Inuit Art from the Albrecht Collection at the Heard Museum*, Heard Museum, Phoenix. Catalogue.

2009 September-November 2009, *Sanattiaqsimajut: Inuit Art from the Carleton University Art Gallery Collection*, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa. Catalogue.

2011 April-August 2011, *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Catalogue.

2011–12 December 2011–February 2012, *Women in Charge, Inuit Contemporary Women Artists*, Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini, Rome.

2013 January-April 2013, *Creation and Transformation: Defining Moments in Inuit Art*, Winnipeg Art Gallery.



Installation view of the exhibition *Pitseolak* at Simon Fraser Gallery, Vancouver, 1976.



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde

PRIMARY SOURCES

Oral histories are the most important source of information on Pitseolak Ashoona's life and art. The tapes and transcripts from her interviews with Dorothy Eber that formed the basis for *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life* (1971), are located in the archives of the Canadian Museum of History, in Gatineau, Quebec. Later interviews with family members by Marion E. Jackson are held by the Aboriginal Art Centre at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa. The Cape Dorset Drawing Archive is the most comprehensive resource for understanding Pitseolak's artistic development and scope. Since 1959 each annual release of the Cape Dorset prints has been accompanied by an illustrated catalogue through which her prints can be traced. Another crucial resource is the Inuit Artists' Print Database, which includes the extensive documentation on prints done by Sandra Barz, and can be accessed at the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives: http://www.gallery.ca/inuit_artists/home.jsp?Lang=EN.

Archival fonds relating to individual Inuit artists are rare. Artist files remain a principal resource for Pitseolak, including those of other Ashoona family members, which often contain compiled biographical information, exhibition lists and announcements, newspaper clippings, and interview transcripts.

Aboriginal Art Centre, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa

Canadian Museum of History Archives, Gatineau, Quebec

Cape Dorset Drawing Archive, West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, housed at the

McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario

Library and Archives Canada, Canadian Eskimo Art Council fonds, Ottawa

National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa

York University, Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage video archives, Toronto

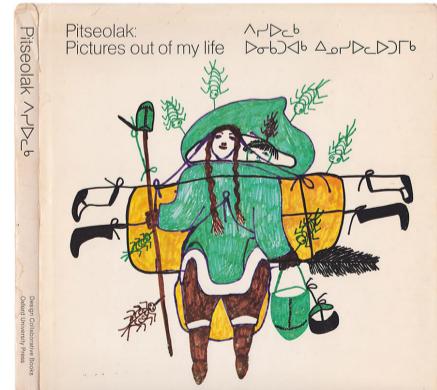
CRITICAL TEXTS ON PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Texts on Pitseolak Ashoona fall into two main periods: the early 1970s, beginning with *Pictures Out of My Life*; and the 1980s, following her death.

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Eber, Dorothy Harley. "Remembering Pitseolak Ashoona." *Arts and Culture of the North* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 436.

Gillmor, Alison. "The Ashoona Family of Cape Dorset." *Inuit Art Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 38-39.



The first edition of *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*, published in 1971, features Pitseolak's *In summer there were always very big mosquitoes*, 1970, coloured felt-tip pen, 68.6 x 53.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Goetz, Helga. "An Eskimo Lifetime in Pictures / Ein Eskimo-Leben in Bildern / Une vie d'Esquimau en images." *Graphis* 27, no. 157 (1972): 506-12.

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FILM, AUDIO, VIDEO

Heczko, Bozenna, dir. *Pictures Out of My Life: The Drawings and Recollections of Pitseolak*. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2009. 1973. DVD video, partial animation. Originally produced in 1973. 13:09 min.

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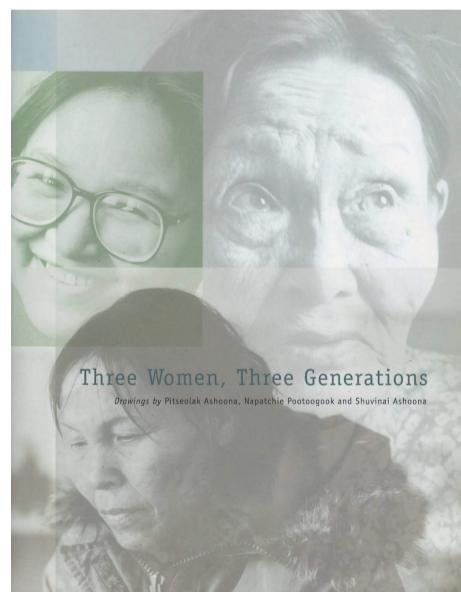
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—. *In Cape Dorset We Do It This Way: Three Decades of Inuit Printmaking*. Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1991. Exhibition catalogue.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHRISTINE LALONDE

Christine Lalonde is Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada. She has worked with Inuit artists across the North since the mid-1990s. She remains actively engaged with the arts community, frequently travelling to events in northern communities and urban centres in Canada and abroad.

Since completing her MA thesis on the drawings of Pitseolak Ashoona, she has held several different curatorial positions at the National Gallery of Canada. Her many exhibition projects have advanced an appreciation for Inuit artists across the country and have reached new international audiences, such as *Sanaugavut: Inuit Art from the Canadian Arctic*, held at the National Museum in New Delhi in 2010. The scope of her knowledge and interest encompasses both historic and contemporary art, as seen in two simultaneous travelling exhibitions in 2005: *ItuKiagâtt! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group*, which focused on works from the earliest periods, acquired by the bank to mark Canada's centennial in 1967; and *Inuit Sculpture Now*, which featured sixteen sculptors who have been leaders in their art since the 1990s. With the critically acclaimed exhibition *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* she worked with Indigenous artists around the world, bringing their artwork into dynamic and thought-provoking dialogue.

Recognized for her commitment to new methodologies, Lalonde has explored experimental approaches to presenting work by Indigenous artists, providing a balance between commemorating their artistic accomplishments and raising awareness of critical issues. She is widely published in exhibition catalogues, critical essays, and articles. In 2014, as editor of *Inuit Art Quarterly*, she relaunched the publication with an issue dedicated to Kenojuak Ashevak, and in the following issue featured contributions by several Inuit authors. She continues as the Chair of the Editorial Board for *Inuit Art Quarterly*.



"As a student at the National Gallery I came across a series of gem-like drawings by Pitseolak, so lively and colourful that they seemed to glow. I realized that even with a famous artist like Pitseolak, there was still much to learn. As I began to go through her thousands of drawings for my research, I gained a deep respect for her dedication to her art. A photograph of Pitseolak, drawing in her tent, hangs over my desk to inspire me to work hard."



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From the Art Canada Institute

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Pitseolak Ashoona, Drawing for print *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1966–76. (See below for details.)

Credits for Banner Images



Biography: Pitseolak in Cape Dorset, 1968, photograph by Norman Hallendy. (See below for details.)



Key Works: Pitseolak Ashoona, *The Critic*, c. 1963. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Untitled (Solitary Figure on the Landscape)*, c. 1980. (See below for details.)



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

Life & Work by Christine Lalonde



Style & Technique: Pitseolak Ashoona, *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1974. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: Contact sheet of installation views of the exhibition *Pitseolak* at Simon Fraser Gallery, Vancouver, 1976. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau.



Where to See: Installation view of the exhibition *Pitseolak* at Simon Fraser Gallery, Vancouver, 1976. (See below for details.)

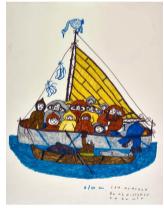
Credits for Works by Pitseolak Ashoona



Camp at Igadalik, 1973. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The Critic, c. 1963. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Drawing for print *Eskimos on Sealskin Boat*, c. 1966-72. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2528. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Drawing for print *Innuksuk Builders*, c. 1966-68. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1428. © Dorset Fine Arts.



PITSEOLAK ASHOONA

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Drawing for print *Journey to Toodja*, c. 1973. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.3577. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Drawing for print *Memories of Childbirth*, 1976. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1184. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Drawing for print *The River at Netsilik*, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.4031. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Drawing for print *Summer Camp Scene*, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1736. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Dream of Motherhood, 1969. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The Eyes of a Happy Woman, c. 1974. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Fantastic Animals, c. 1970. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10668. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Festive Bird, 1970. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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First Bird of Spring, 1975. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. © Dorset Fine Arts.



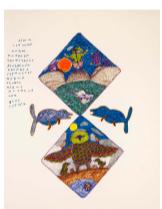
In summer there were always big mosquitoes, 1970. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10664. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Innuksuk Builders, 1967. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Joyful Owl, 1961. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Legend of the Woman Who Turned into a Narwhal, c. 1974. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Memories of Childbirth, 1976. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CDP.27.8.1. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Moving Camp, c. 1971. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10671. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Portrait of Ashoona, c. 1970. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The Race, c. 1973. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The Shaman's Wife, 1980. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Summer Camp Scene, c. 1974. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Summer Camping, c. 1960-65. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10656. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Summer Voyage, 1971. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10670. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Summer Wanderers Watch Woman Scraping Hide, 1961. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Tattooed Woman, 1963. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/9570. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Tattooed Woman, 1960. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10648. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Bird and Woman), c. 1966–76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2974. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Bird Flying Overhead), c. 1966–67. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2969. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Birds Flying Overhead), c. 1966–67. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.3342. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Camp joyfully greeting the return of a family member), 1976. Private collection. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Solitary Figure on the Landscape), c. 1980. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.6405. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Untitled (Woman Attacked by Birds), c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1621. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1959-61. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.48. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1959-65. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.194. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1959-65. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.254. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1959-65. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.522. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1960. Private collection, Kingston. Photograph by Paul Litherland. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1962. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.390. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1962-64. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1247. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Untitled, c. 1965. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.819. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1965. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.907. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1966-67. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1651. © Dorset Fine Arts.



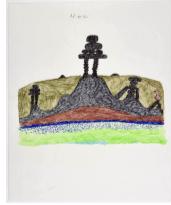
Untitled, c. 1966-67. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1306. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.1357. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2338. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2462 . © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Untitled, c. 1966-76. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.2513. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, 1976. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.4434. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1979-80. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.6419. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, c. 1979-80. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.6487. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled, 1981. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, CD.27.6601. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Winter Camping, 1966-76. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10675. Dieter Hessel Photography, Courtesy of Walker's Fine Art & Estate Auctioneers. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Woman with an Ulu, 1962. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Women Gutting Fish, 1960-65. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2002, 2002/10657. © Dorset Fine Arts.



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Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



Aliguq's Seaweed Spirits, 1996-97, by Napachie Pootoogook. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2008-98. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Bust of a Woman Holding "Ajuktaut" Racquet, c. 1977, by Qaqaq Ashoona. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



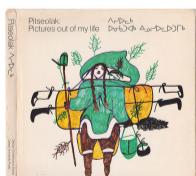
The camp of Pitseolak's uncle Kavavow at Idjirituq in the winter, c. 1921-22, photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, 3000.33.728.



Catalogue for the McMichael Canadian Art Collection exhibition *Three Women, Three Generations: Drawings by Pitseolak Ashoona, Napatchie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona* (Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1999).



Drawing of My Tent, 1982, by Napachie Pootoogook. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The first edition of Pitseolak's autobiography, *Pictures Out of My Life* (Montreal: Design Collaborative Books; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971).



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Fox pelts hanging from the rigging of the Bowdoin at Idjirituq, 1922, photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, 3000.33.590.



Head of a Woman, c. 1960-69, by Kumwartok Ashoona. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Hudson's Bay Company post, Cape Dorset, 1928, photograph by J. Dewey Soper. J. Dewey Soper fonds, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 79-21-34-206.



Installation view of the exhibition *Pitseolak* at Simon Fraser Gallery, Vancouver, 1976. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau.



Inuit artists and Terrence Ryan at the print studio in Cape Dorset, 1961, photograph by B. Korda. Library and Archives Canada.



Inuit artists of the Cape Dorset co-operative, 1961, photograph by B. Korda. Library and Archives Canada.



Inuit cairn on the limestone plateau at the northern tip of Baffin Island, 1929, photograph by J. Dewey Soper. J. Dewey Soper fonds, University of Alberta, Edmonton.



James, John, Samuel, and Alma Houston in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, 1960, photograph by Rosemary Gilliat Eaton. Library and Archives Canada.



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Jean Chrétien, Pitseolak Ashoona, and Jessie Oonark at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, 1973. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau.



Kaliviktato/Skipping, 1976, by Sorosilutu Ashoona. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Map of southern Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island). © Eric Leinberger.



Mary Ezekiel, 1958, photograph by Peter Pitseolak. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau.



Napachie's Family, 1998-99, by Napachie Pootoogook. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2008-42. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Pictures of My Drawings, 2007, by Shuvinai Ashoona. Private collection. Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber at the presentation of the artist's autobiography, *Pictures Out of My Life*, 1971, photograph by David Zimmerly. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau.



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Pitseolak and her brother Kavavow, c. 1921-22, photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.



Pitseolak drawing in bed in her son Kumwartok's house, c. 1975. © Tessa Macintosh.



Pitseolak drawing in her summer tent in Cape Dorset, June 1967. Photograph by Evelyn Crees.



Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed, 2006, by Annie Pootoogook. Private Collection. Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Pitseolak in Cape Dorset, 1968, photograph by Norman Hallendy. McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives, Kleinburg, Gift of Norman Hallendy, 2007, ARC-NH2007.4.1.



Pitseolak in Cape Dorset, c. 1975. © Tessa Macintosh.



Pitseolak was one of four Canadian women featured on a series of postage stamps released in 1993. © Canada Post.



Pitseolak's father, Ottokie, in Idjirituq, c. 1921-22, photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, 3000.33.622.



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Pitseolak's Hardships #2, 1999-2000, by Napachie Pootoogook. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2008-44. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Portrait of Ashoona, c. 1929, photograph by J. Dewey Soper. J. Dewey Soper fonds, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 79-21-34-206.



Portrait of My Guide, Baffin Island, 1976, by J. Dewey Soper. Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary.



Portrait of Pitseolak Ashoona, c. 1942-45, photograph by Peter Pitseolak. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau.



Postcard for the 1971 exhibition of Pitseolak's drawings at the Innuit Gallery in Toronto. York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, Avrom Isaacs fonds (F0134). York University, Toronto.



Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau wears a fur hat and parka at the 1970 Arctic Winter Games in Yellowknife, photograph by Henry Busse. NWT Archives, Yellowknife, N-1979-052:1234.



Printmakers Iyola Kingwatsiaq and Eegyvudluk Pootoogook in 1960, pulling a print of Pitseolak's *Joyful Owl*, photograph by Rosemary Gilliat Eaton.



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The schooner Bowdoin at Idjirituq (Schooner Bay) during the winter, 1922, photograph by Donald Baxter MacMillan. Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, 3000.33.422.



Sealskin appliqué by "Pitsulak," c. 1958. Location unknown, photographer unknown.



Stone Images Mark the Western Sea Route, 1960, by Kiakshuk. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. © Dorset Fine Arts.



The Story of Nuliajuk, 2009, by Goota Ashoona. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2010-26.



Three Generations, 2005, by Annie Pootoogook. Private Collection. Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts. © Dorset Fine Arts.



An undated newspaper clipping illustrates the wide press coverage surrounding the publication of *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*. Collection of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Gatineau.



Untitled (Childhood Dream), 1980-81, by Kiugak Ashoona. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario CD.64.94. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Untitled (Napachie Saving Nujaliaq), 1997-98, by Napachie Pootoogook. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Dorset Fine Arts.



Woman Scraping Sealskin, 1961, by Kiakshuk. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

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